A
STERANKO

# THE STERANKO HISTORY OF COMICS 2

This book is the second of a projected series of six volumes tracing the historical and sociological development of visual storytelling in the medium of the comic book. Volume One covered the following subjects:

COMING ATTRACTIONS—The origins of the graphic story up to the newspaper strips
THE BLOODY PULPS—The influence of the pulp magazines
THE SUPER STAR—The ultimate fantasy hero, Superman
THE PLAYBOY HERO—The legend of Batman and Robin
THE AMERICAN IDOL—The life and times of Captain America
SUPER DOUBLE FEATURE—Sub-Mariner vs. The Human Torch, other Timely heroes
BEST SUPPORTING CHARACTERS—Flash, Hawkman, Justice Society, more DC heroes
THE KID PLAYERS—The kid gangs of the comics' Golden Age.

The remaining volumes will record the comic chronology through the 40's, into the 50's and 60's, on up to the present time. Full color copies of the covers to all published volumes are available without type from Supergraphics. Other material related to visual storytelling and comic art is currently in production. For information, send twenty five cents for postage and handling to Supergraphics, Box 445, Wyomissing, Pennsylvania, 19610.

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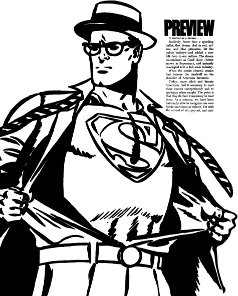
# THE STERANKO
# HISTORY OF COMICS



# PREVIEW

It started as a dream . . .

Suddenly, faster than a speeding bullet, that dream, clad in red, yellow, and blue primaries, hit the public bullseye—and added a new folk hero to our culture. The dream materialized as Clark Kent (better known as Superman), and instantly developed into a full scale industry.

When the smoke cleared, comics had become the dandruff on the shoulder of American literature.

Today, many adult and literate Americans find it necessary to read these comics surreptitiously and to apologize when caught. The point is that they do find it necessary to read them. As a country, we have been habitually slow to recognize our own fertile inventions as culture. Yet with the advent of art, pop art, and antiart, there seems to be a general awakening to the wonderous visual freedom which is the very core of comic or super art.

It seems to be only a matter of time before the comics are "discovered" to embody significant and lasting values, and are allowed to join other American phenomena such as Mark Twain, Charlie Chaplin, Walt Disney, or jazz.

With their unbridled vision and compelling immediacy, who is to say that the comics could not be the neo-classics of the Space Age? With words becoming more obsolete every day, the language of pictures becomes proportionately more universal.

One way or another, the comics have crept into our life style: movies, plays, TV series—"leapin' lizards," even into our vocabulary. The comic formula of one man combatting overwhelming evil has certainly become the American way.

When judging any art, we are warned against confusing mere popularity with genuine quality. But by the same token, we must not ignore the living principle of democracy: the ultimate validity of mass opinion. If the comics are described as "primitive" art, then indeed they must be art. Those who term them as a "throw-away" culture, admit they are nonetheless a culture. Like rock or electronic music, abstract painting, or "beat" poetry, the aspect of comics as real art or a major creative invention must and will ultimately be decided on a personal level.

**The second essential of art after order is symbolism, and this is always present in comics in prodigious supply. From Siegfried to Superman, from Atlas to Captain America, the moral values of Western civilization have been remarkably consistent. The struggle and ultimate victory of the comic super hero is simply a reaffirmation of the value system of our culture.**

One thing is certain: the comics belong to the people.

The comic format itself—the picture story—is nothing new. Iconography and imagery existed ages before the written word. Prehistoric man splashed pigment on the walls of caves to evoke magic for the following day's kill. The Egyptians did it their own way, in the tombs of the pharoahs. Tapestries and illuminated manuscripts continued the form, telling bold tales of warrior kings conquering supernatural monsters. Superheroes, it seemed, were here to stay.

The fabric of legend has always heralded the coming of larger-than-life heroes such as Hercules, Ulysses, Theseus, Beowulf, Siegfried, and Samson. Contemporary literature carried on the tradition: Shakespeare made his hero super-swift in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Jonathan Swift appeared to make him tall as a giant or small as an insect in *Gulliver's Travels*; Jules Verne created heroes who faced death on the surface of the moon or the ocean's floor with equal aplomb, Poe envisioned the first super-sleuth, Kipling made his hero talk to animals, while H. G. Wells made him invisible.

The comics merely reiterate what epic poets such as Homer have sung through the centuries: good triumphs over evil. Granted the comics are much more direct and credulous, so is the audience at which they aim. They are nevertheless equally as didactic.

Through the centuries, visual storytelling changed its form almost as much as it changed subject matter. Then, on February 16, 1896, in Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World*, an event occurred which drew all the threads together. That Sunday, R. F. Outcault gave birth to the modern comic strip when he created The Yellow Kid. Clad in a grimy yellow nightshirt, the Kid lent his name to spectacular journalism, and spawned a profusion of offspring destined to become more popular than all the Seven Lively Arts combined.

And so it went: Tarzan, Hammer, Bond, all dream-selves whose purpose is to establish a personal primacy in a world in which reality diminishes the individual. The comics were no different.

Newspaper strips developed rapidly into a structured and sophisticated orchestration of panels, word balloons, and captions—a dazzling confusion of imagination, fantasy, and fact, all deliberately arranged and perfectly staged. Flash Gordon, Buck Rogers, Dick Tracy, Mandrake, Prince Valiant, and the Phantom set the pace for thousands of lineal descendants.

Meanwhile, pulp magazines sold by the millions. Characters such as The Shadow, G-8 and His Battle Aces, Operator 5, Doc Savage, The Phantom Detective, The Spider, and hundreds of others declared a personal war on the Napoleons of crime who sprang up month after month to plunder, intimidate, and annihilate the rest of the world.

The bloody pulps (as they were called) exploited every subject imaginable—western, war, adventure, mystery, horror, science fiction—with incredibly undisciplined vitality. No plot was too remote. No idea too fantastic. Publishing empires were built on the public's voracious appetite for spectacular heroics.

As the books approached a saturation point, pulp marketeers looked around for a new way to sell their product, and discovered the comics. Reprint newspaper strips were mildly successful at first, but something was missing. Then publishers applied the pulp formula: an intensity of style and pacing, an energy that was sustained without letup from start to finish. The lyrical and the grotesque merged into a new kind of high fantasy.

Superman appeared, and the dream was caught and fixed in mythological amber. He became to the super-hero cult what Hamlet is to English Shakesperians. While newspaper strips took months to tell a single adventure, and pulps required the tedium of page upon page of 10 point type, comics visualized their epics so the entire action could be seen as a vibrant, electric panorama.

Somehow it all helped us grow up with a joyous sense of wonder. Judy Garland followed the yellow brick road. Pennsylvania 6-5000 was a song, not a phone number. There were Secret Squadron decoders, shake-up mugs, complex premium rings, and ingenious code-a-graphs. The movies had Betty Grable's legs, a sled named Rosebud, and Bogart telling Mary Astor he won't because all of him wants to. It was a time to enjoy, and grow up at our own pace.

The comic panel, the comic strip, and the comic book became a part of our lives.

Meanwhile super heroes became the comic publishers' holy grail. It was an era of capes and masks and secret identities, when no hero could be caught with his trunks down. There was work for everyone. The laws of gravity and physics went spectacularly awry. Crime and crime-crushing reached a peak. It was the Golden Age of Comics.

World War II.

America armed itself to hurl back the Axis invaders in Europe. So did the comics—and Captain America, Spy Smasher, and The Blackhawks became full public figures. Comics became million-sellers because their's was a world without death, with no noticable seam between reality and magic, a world of super-acrobatics and ultra-pratfalls, where common clay became uncommon heroes.

The comic books were much less formal and rigid than the newspaper strips which had to pass strict editorial censorship. Comics were drawn and written primarily by young undisciplined artists whose ids ran wild on the four-color page. By following their own elemental impulses, they were able to translate 4-dimensional rhythms into 2-dimensional comic pages. They created instant super-stars, often by accident, innocently, without for a moment suspecting the Niagara of success which would soon follow. They were boys who started out with a dream and a million panels later found themselves to be the authors of a new culture—an American manifestation of an American art form—the comics.

As a cultural phenomenon, comics have already spanned more than three-quarters of a century. Yet little has been written (except for a few fatal purges) which seriously undertakes to explore and explain one of the most popular mediums for sheer entertainment ever conceived. Newspaper strips have always received whatever critical attention had to be paid to the form, while comic books and their multitude of heroes have been conveniently ignored, obviously considered too shallow to receive critical assessment.

With this in mind, I sought to fill the gap with a definitive series of books on comics, which stress the social and historical development of the form. My purpose is not to dissect their magic, but to reveal and amplify the off-beat, the on-beat, and the heartbeat of the comic chronology.

It seems to me that history must be more than just cyclopedic listing. It must explore the how, what, when, where and why—not only of the characters themselves, but their creators: the writers, artists, editors, and publishers who made it all happen. It is the historian's task to search out the hidden shape of events and make an interpretation as to how they came to be created. No effort has been spared to achieve those results.

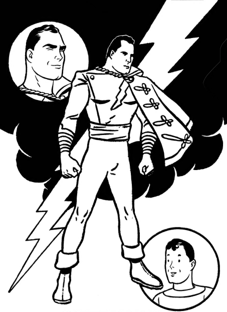
In every case, the material required for totally comprehensive research was sought out until it was found. Certain books and original pieces of art took months to locate. In addition, all biographical data was collected through personal interviews whenever possible, in order to maintain a kind of spontaneity and reduce errors to a minimum.

Volume Two of the *History of Comics* is a compelling words and pictures portrait of the Golden Age of heroes. The young reader will find this entourage an eye-opening primer to the world of comics. Those who were around at the time will discover a bonanza of nostalgic bits of business. The student of comic art will be brought right up-to-date on the era of the Golden Age.

Call them the funnies (1930's), or earth time capsules (1970's).

Call them what you will, but enjoy them.

*STERANKO*



C. C. Beck's CAPTAIN THUNDER renamed CAPTAIN MARVEL for *Whiz* 2.

Night!

Deserted streets glistened with rain and mirrored the ebony skies above. A boy, huddled in a subway entrance for shelter, hawked the evening papers. His only prospect, a bent figure in a dark coat—his hat pulled across his face. Was it the rain or . . . no matter! The kid stopped the approaching figure.

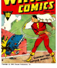
"Paper, sir?"

"Why aren't you home in bed, son?"

"I have no home, sir! I sleep in the subway station! It's warm there!"

"Follow me!" The stranger beckoned, eye-slits gleaming white under a shadowy brim.

With no further words the pair entered the subway, long shadows cast ominously behind them. "Suddenly a strange subway car, with headlights gleaming like a dragon's eyes, roared into the station and stopped —no one was driving it!"



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The car itself was predominantly black and decorated with a profusion of circles and triangles (even a Star of David) arranged in mystical symbolism.

"Have no fear," said the man in black as he ushered the newsboy through a circular doorway. "Everything has been arranged!"

"The moment the passengers are seated," a caption told, "the car hurtles through a pitch-black tunnel at tremendous speed! The car has stopped at the end of the line! The boy enters an ancient, underground hall, carved out of solid rock, grotesquely lighted by flaring torches!"

Along the way, they pass "The Seven Deadly Enemies of Man"—a series of idols (half-African, half-cartoon) labeled Pride, Envy, Greed, Hatred, Selfishness, Laziness, Injustice. At the end of the cavern, a bearded old man wrapped in robes waited patiently upon a marble throne flanked by a brazier, a huge book and a miniature globe.

"Welcome, Billy Batson!"

"H-how did you know my name?"

"I know everything! I am—SHAZAM!"

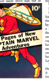
At the mention of his name, a bolt of lightning boomed magically from a black cloud. A curious inscription appeared on the wall behind the old timer, listing the names and powers of five ancient gods and one Biblical character who headed the list:

Solomon—Wisdom
Hercules—Strength
Atlas—Stamina
Zeus—Power
Achilles—Courage
Mercury—Speed

"For 3,000 years I have used the wisdom, strength, stamina, power, courage and speed the gods have given me to battle the forces of evil which every day threaten to extinguish man from the face of earth!"

**SHAZAM!**

(The whole affair was positively theological— one began to expect the stone tablets of Moses to turn up at any moment.) Then, by clapping his hands, old Shazam produced the Historama, a super TV set which showed the past, present, and future. Through the machine, Shazam watched Billy's life, his parents die, and his wicked uncle drive him out of his home in order to keep his inheritance.



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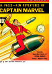
"All my life I have fought injustice and cruelty! But I am old now—and my time is almost up! You shall be my successor! Merely by speaking my name, you can become the strongest and mightiest man in the world—CAPTAIN MARVEL! Speak my name!"

Wide-eyed, Billy spoke. "Shazam!" More lightning! More thunder!!

Suddenly Billy changed. Not only his clothes, but physically. His red shirt and blue trousers were replaced by a flashy vermillion uniform with a lightning bolt emblazoned across the chest, golden wristbands, boots and waist sash, and a short white cape. He had suddenly put on a hundred muscle-packed pounds, but more important, his face was different. Billy's innocent, dot-eyes had become relentless, evil-seeking slits. Look out, crime!

"Captain Marvel, I salute you!" the ancient continued. "Henceforth it shall be your sacred duty to defend the poor and helpless, right wrongs and crush evil everywhere!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To become Billy Batson again also speak my name! And now I must go! Captain Marvel, speak my name!"

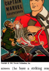
As the red-garbed figure said the magic word, a massive granite block that had been hanging by a thread, fell and crushed the old sorcerer to powder.

Suddenly, Billy was back on the street where it all began. "Gee! It all seems like a dream!"

The next day proved equally as memorable. Newspaper headlines told of a mad scientist threatening the city. The police were baffled. If only Billy could help. Acting on a hunch, he follows two suspiciously acting men to the Skytower Apartments. Hoping to turn this information to his own benefit in the good old American get-up-and-go attitude that would have pleased Horatio Alger, Billy goes to see Sterling Morris,"radio head" of a station that later issues would reveal as Station WHIZ. If Billy located the madman who threatened to drive all radio stations off the air (unless he was paid $5,000,000), would Mr. Morris give him a job as a radio announcer? The white-haired executive agreed to hire even a ten-year-old for the job, if his business could be saved.

That night, as Captain Marvel, Billy returns to the apartment building where he had trailed the men who spoke of working for the "maniac scientist." Through a window, Captain Marvel sees the leering face of Dr. Sivana on a television screen (he bore a striking resemblance to Billy's thieving uncle). "The fools!" sneered the bespectacled gnome. "They wouldn't pay what I demanded! At midnight we will drive every radio station from the *air—forever!*"

Here was his first test. Crashing through the window, the World's Mightiest Mortal picks up a thug and sends him flying through the air, smashing the radio-silencer to smithereens. (Small thanks Billy got —he never even had his own radio series.) Another hood desperately rushes into a private elevator, and sends it hurtling downward to safety. Undaunted, Captain Marvel rips open the metal door and hauls the elevator back up, reeling in the car's steel cable, hand over hand.



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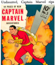

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Rapidly overwhelming the crook and the rest of the gang, the crimson crimefighter turns to the two-way TV screen and Sivana's image. "Well, Sivana, that's the end of your radio-silencer." The diminutive figure shook his fist, "But not the end of me! We will meet again—Captain Marvel!" Displaying a bit of pique, the Captain demolished the television set.

As Billy Batson, he called Sterling Morris to show him the outcome of his investigation. Billy had the radio manager promise to keep all this a secret and Morris confirmed Billy's job.

"Billy Batson—radio reporter! Boy, oh, boy! Here's where we go to town! Me an' . . ."

"You and who else, son?"

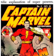
"Er, nobody, sir! Just me and the microphone! That's all, sir! Just me and mike!"

The story, of course, was the landmark adventure that presented Captain Marvel to the comic world. That adventure was dominated—no, literally overwhelmed—by a single, dictatorial element that could only be described by the word SIMPLICITY. Concept, plot, dialogue, art were all created within that framework.

Compared to Captain Marvel, headliners like Superman, Captain America, and Batman read like King Lear. The opening script was as simple and unadorned as a second-grade reader. The drawings looked like they had been cut from craft paper and pasted-up. More often than not, backgrounds were completely eliminated. Panels had huge open spaces. The art was so ultra-simple, it was decieving—nothing more than the barest of outlines. Even the youngest comic reader could have no trouble understanding the story.

Billed as the "World's Mightiest Man," Captain Marvel made his debut in *Whiz Comics* 2, February 1940. That book would be the root of a prodigious family tree, the spawn of which would eventually outnumber and even outsell the mighty Superman line-up. Yet to speak of them together is to risk an invidious comparison. They tell almost identical tales—it is the basics that are dissimilar.

From a conceptual standpoint they originated from totally different sources. Superman was based on a foundation of science fiction: the advanced parent civilization, the rocket ship escape, the pseudo-scientific explanation of super powers. Captain Marvel was born of mythological sources. To be sure, certain S-F elements were there, but never as more than background motifs.



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Certainly there were differences between the two giants. Captain Marvel had no romantic interest, not even a rival lady newscaster. One began to wonder if his writers knew about girls. Nope! The red and yellow garbed crusader was simply too boyishly enthralled with his station in life to give a long look at the opposite sex. And Billy—he was too young (maybe too poor, he almost always wore the same sweater and was never promoted from his job). Another difference lay in the fact that Billy's shock of black hair became well-groomed when he changed personalities. Clark Kent's impeccable coif, on the other hand, threw an unruly curl across Superman's heroic forehead *after* the change.

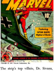
Although muscular and handsome, Captain Marvel was all-cartoon, compared to the Superman art. His seemingly closed eyes would pop open and become large black dots when he was surprised enough to gasp, "Holy Moley!" His alter ego, Billy Batson, perpetually had the round black dot-eyes (contrasting to Little Orphan Annie's round, white dots), expressing, perhaps, the continual wonder of childhood.

Still, the end results were quite comparable. Both Captain Marvel and Superman were ultra-strong. Both were invulnerable. Both could fly. Both had alter egos (in news media at that). Both wore tight fitting costumes with boots, capes, and identifying chest symbols. Of course, a hundred other heroes fit the same pattern. Why then, was Captain Marvel a super stand-out?

His first adventure was no different than a dozen other origin tales. In fact, many others were more dramatic, better drawn, and more interestingly written. Actually, still another element was soon added to the engaging simplicity shown in the opening story. That element was humor—irreverent, outrageous humor that seemed to make the antics of the "World's Mightiest Mortal," a satire of the super-straight adventures of the "Man of Steel."

In his formative years, Superman considered humor anathematic to his position as super hero number one. He was a legend to look up to, not laugh at—strictly St. George and The Dragon material. So was Captain Marvel, but with all his deeds of derring-do, he was still fifty-percent Wizard of Oz.

Sure, Superman had occasional gags and puns, but Captain Marvel always played it strictly for laughs. The strip's top villain, Dr. Sivana, even took to calling his flying foe the "Big Red Cheese." It was all disgracefully funny.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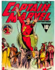
The mighty Marvel often appeared confused, perplexed, and frustrated. If a super-hero couldn't get respect from a twirp like Sivana, whom he foiled almost every issue, there was only one thing to do—join in the fun! Soon the strip was populated by a host of Marvelous characters that stretched the imagination—from talking tigers to mastermind worms bent on world domination. No wonder Captain Marvel was confused. But readers weren't; they loved it!

And why shouldn't they? Most headliners offered a token sidekick for their young comic fans to identify with. Didn't they know that no kid wanted to be Bucky if he could be Captain America instead? Robin was just a second choice, a bit player, when young imaginations became their favorite heroes. Not so with Captain Marvel!

You started out as second banana Billy Batson and—SHAZAM!!—you said the magic word and suddenly were an adult capable of righting any wrongs inflicted upon you. In short, the ultimate childhood fantasy.

Superman tried his best to make us believe his adventures were the real thing. His scripts and art always seemed to tie together threads of reality. Captain Marvel never even attempted such a task; he existed strictly in the world of make-believe and we all knew it. No plotline was too fantastic, no situation too far out. It all became an integral part of the simplicity/satire formula. The editors, writers, and artists worked out the details of that formula in the next few issues of *Whiz*.

In *Whiz* 3, Billy Batson had become a full-fledged radio reporter with a remote broadcast transmitter strapped to his back (far in advance of gadgetry that real-life commentators like Lowell Thomas and H. V. Kaltenborn had to work with at the time). His assignment took him to the home of eccentric, black-bearded Professor Xerxes Smith who had built a rocketship to fly to the planet Venus. Billy managed to weedle an invitation to go along, later proving his worth by becoming Captain Marvel and successfully battling a rampaging Venusian dragon.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SOLOMON HERCULES ATLAS ZEUS ACHILLES MERCURY

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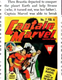
However, that escape was short-lived, because he and the professor were immediately captured by giant frog-men and taken before Beautia, the veiled Empress of Venus. Before the throne, the bearded scientist removed his whiskers to reveal himself as Sivana. Beautia decided to unveil her own features and her "sinister beauty affected Captain Marvel like a powerful drug!"

Despite the wisdom of Solomon, Captain Marvel seemed no more at ease around a pretty girl (whose "sinister beauty" was that of a well-scrubbed high school cheerleader) than young Billy. This bedazzled condition may explain why Marvel was able to be immobilized by the use of fifty-ton weights and super-steel cables, restraints that he would laugh at after flexing his muscles for a few more issues.

Then Beautia departed to conquer the planet Earth and help Sivana (who, it turned out, was her father). Captain Marvel was able to break free of his bonds and construct another rocketship to follow the Sivana family back to Earth. (Again, after only a few more months, he would think nothing of making the flight on his own superhuman power).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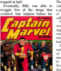
For some reason, Beautia's winning a beauty contest was considered an integral part in seizing control of the world, so win she did. Meanwhile, Papa Sivana planned to paralyze the will of every man, woman, and child in America by using a special gas he had invented. The good Captain arrived in time to stop the scheme, though Beautia got away with winning the contest.

It was during that adventure on Venus that Sivana first learned the secret of Shazam when Billy used the magic word to become Captain Marvel to fight the dragon. In *Whiz* 4, Sivana used that information by capturing Billy before he could speak the enchanted word, and placed him bound and gagged in front of "the memory mangler—whose rays will make you forget your little magic word!" Sivana gloated. The big red cheese was trapped at last!

Eventually, Billy was able to struggle free of the straps that rendered him helpless before the diabolic machine. Dimly sensing it was hurting him, he tried to wreck it, only to be stopped by Sivana's hoods who promised, "We'll fix your wagon, Brat!" Instead they were stopped by Beautia who had taken time from her campaign to be elected President of the United States on a platform of her beauty. She sent Billy to hide for his safety just before the gang turned against Sivana and "Miss Pretty Puss", leaving them tied to a keg of TNT sprouting a lit fuse.



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Fortunately, by rather broad coincidence, Billy wandered into the old subway tunnel where he had first gained his powers. The sight of the inscription of the ancient heroes' names and powers somehow made Billy utter the mystic word. He proceed to save the day and his adversaries from the TNT doom.

Actually Billy had no idea how magic that word Shazam could be. But the Fawcett Publishing Company did! All at once they had a super-star in their stable and they decided to put him to work. Simultaneously with *Whiz* 8, September 1940, Captain Marvel turned up in a complete book of his own, titled *Special Edition Comics*.

The cover showed Captain Marvel jauntily riding a giant explosive shell through the air. Oddly enough, his sash had a buckle with the initial M inscribed. Other costume changes included the buttoned shirt-flap coming and going on inside pages, and the sash alternately dangling and being tucked in. Obviously, the stories had been done at various periods during Captain Marvel's short career and were in no particular order.

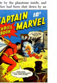
The lead story in *Special Edition* was a combination of child-like simplicity in storytelling coupled with a genuine offbeat imagination. The tale featured Professor Universe (sinister master of all knowledge), a phony prizefighter named Slaughter Slade, and a Kong-sized gorilla called Dr. Allirog.

No first issue of Captain Marvel would be complete without an appearance of Dr. Sivana, and he was on hand in a story apparently intended for *Whiz* 4, whose cover had depicted a scene from that story.

This time, Billy stowed away on a rocketship he had become suspicious of in an alley in his city (what a nose for news). It took him again to Venus where Billy found that Sivana and his lovely but dumb daughter, Beautia, were up to more deviltry. This time he was driving insurance companies out of business by destroying insured crops with Venusian insects. The ever-ready Captain Marvel swatted both the insects and Sivana.

The book was rounded out with a sports story in which the good Captain proved he could outrace any takers on foot or in the air; and another episode titled, "The Haunted House." (This story was reprinted in *Captain Marvel Thrill Book*, a 1941 one-shot which also featured other stories from early *Whiz Comics*. It was one of Fawcett's offbeat size comics, about as large as *True Magazine*.)

In this mystery tale, Billy investigated the haunted Grood Mansion. One man's hair had been turned white by the phantoms inside, and another had been shot down by an ancient pistol. Billy found the spectral form of J. Morton Grood and an old carriage with a skeleton driver holding the reins to a skeleton horse. Changing to Captain Marvel, he was dropped through a trapdoor into a chamber filled with poison gas which, in those days, affected even the World's Mightiest Mortal. With failing strength, he managed to shut off the gas supply and expose the ghost as the secret, treasure-hunting town councilman who had faked his



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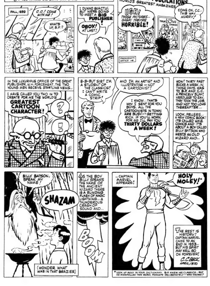
# HOW IT HAPPENED (MORE OR LESS)

☉ ← NaCl ... TAKE ONE GRAIN WITH STORY

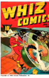
BY C. C. BECK


FALL, 1939
C.C.! COME WITH ME!
WHAT'S UP, B.P.?
I DUNNO EXACTLY, BUT WE'RE GOING TO MEET A BIG PUBLISHER!
OBOY! AT LAST!
B.P. TAKES C.C. TO A MAGNIFICENT BUILDING WHERE HE LEADS HIM DOWN A LONG HALLWAY LINED WITH PRICELESS MAGAZINE COVER ORIGINALS...
PUBLICATIONS
WORLD'S GREATEST MAGAZINES
UGH! THOSE PICTURES... GASP! THEY'RE HORRIBLE!
TRUE LOVE STORIES
I WAS A MONSTER'S BRIDE
COME ON, C.C... THIS WAY... HURRY!
PRESIDENT'S OFFICE →
IN THE LUXURIOUS OFFICE OF THE GREAT PUBLISHER, W.H. FORCEMEAT, THE TWO YOUNG MEN RECEIVE STARTLING NEWS...
I HAVE CALLED YOU TWO IN TO CREATE FOR ME THE WORLD'S GREATEST CARTOON CHARACTER!
?
!
B-B-BUT SIR! I'M A STUDENT OF THE CLASSICS! I CAN'T WRITE A COMIC STRIP!
AND I'M AN ARTIST AND ILLUSTRATOR — NOT A CARTOONIST!
I KNOW... THAT'S WHY I SENT FOR YOU BOYS. ALL THE CARTOONISTS IN TOWN ARE BUSY--GETTING RICH. IF YOU'LL WORK FOR ME I'LL PAY YOU THIRTY DOLLARS A WEEK!
WOW! THIRTY FAST BUCKS A WEEK, IN THOSE DAYS, WAS TO B.P. AND C.C. A PRINCELY SUM! NEEDLESS TO SAY, THEY TOOK THE JOB AND NOT TOO LONG THEREAFTER...
LOOK, FELLERS.. A NEW COMIC BOOK! IT'S CALLED WHIZ COMICS AND IT'S ABOUT A BOY CALLED BILLY BATSON WHO MEETS AN OLD WIZARD AND...
BILLY BATSON, SPEAK MY NAME!
SHAZAM
(WONDER WHAT WAS IN THAT BRAZIER)
AS THE BOY BILLY SPEAKS THE NAME OF THE ANCIENT WIZARD THERE IS A BLINDING FLASH OF MAGIC LIGHTNING... A THUNDEROUS CRASH OF SOUND AND...
BOOM
...CAPTAIN MARVEL APPEARS!
HOLY MOLEY!*
THE REST IS HISTORY! CAPTAIN MARVEL CAME TO AN END IN 1953... BUT HIS SPIRIT MAY WELL GO ON FOREVER!
C.C. BECK
APRIL, 1970
* LOOK UP MOLY IN YOUR DICTIONARY. B.P. KNEW HIS CLASSICS... BUT HE MISSPELLED THE WORD, PERHAPS DELIBERATELY — WHO KNOWS?

hair turning white.

In early 1941, still another book showcased the Marvel mythos, a book with the epic title, *64 Pages of New Captain Marvel Adventures.* Numbering was continued from this issue for the following 154 and the title was shortened to *Captain Marvel Adventures.* The first story dealt with a new ally of Sivana's: a mustached, blue-uniformed superbeing called "Z" who was as powerful as Captain Marvel, and nearly succeeded in drowning him in battle.

"Captain Marvel's lungs fill with water! He must win free or drown," a caption read. "I can't stand too much of this," Captain Marvel admitted to himself. In the end, he escaped and delivered the World's Mightiest Punch to Z, smashing him into a scrapheap of mechanical parts. Z had only been a robot, another invention of Sivana. The rest of the book told an interplanetary story, a vampire horror story, even a Western, and was easily the most unusual and untypical chapter in the entire Marvel history.



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In the next few issues, the World's Mightiest Mortal fought Sivana, the Arson Fiend, Sivana, the Beast-Ruler, Sivana, Hitler, and Dr. Sivana, the World's Maddest Scientist. (Just for the record, his real name was Thaddeus Bodog Sivana.)

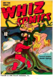
By *Whiz* 5, Captain Marvel had fully developed the power of flying, no longer having to depend merely on tremendous leaps or dives (an undeniable similarity to Superman's developing powers). Passing an airplane on his way to capture the villain, the Mighty Marvel made a gesture very much like thumbing his nose and taunted, "Yah, Yah, you can't catch me!"

The bugs had been ironed out, the pattern was set. The big show, one of the most successful in the history of comics, was about to begin. Yet as successful and popular as Captain Marvel was, the circumstances surrounding his creation have never been completely discovered until this writing. Actually, the series was killed before it was born.

It all began in the fall of 1939.

Ralph Daigh, then executive director of Fawcett Publications, was instructed that the Board of Directors had decided to institute a line of comics for the company. Up to this point, Fawcett was strictly in the magazine business with everything from college humor books to *Mechanix Illustrated.* The big comic boom was waiting just beyond the publishing horizons, waiting for a dawn that would herald the golden age of comics, spawn a profusion of American folk heroes, and build a host of magazine empires.

Books like *Action, Detective* and *Marvel Mystery* had sent seismic shock waves through the publishing industry, and any company that paid heed stood to make a fortune. Daigh looked over the Fawcett ranks and chose Bill Parker to spearhead their comic movement. Parker was a bright, young staffer who was a supervising editor on Fawcett's movie magazines. He had started with them in 1937, working on their line of detective books. Because of his experience in those two areas, Daigh asked Parker if he'd be interested in taking the assignment to develop material for a comic book tentatively titled Whiz. He accepted and became Fawcett's first comic editor on September 25, 1939.



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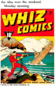
Selecting several adventure themes which seemed as though they would adapt well to the graphic medium of comics, Parker chose a magician, a frontiersman, a masked aviator, and a sea-going soldier of fortune, with which to work. He had a special idea for the lead feature—a strip he envisioned with not one, but six heroes, each having a separate and distinct characteristic with which to balance the scales of justice. One was to have great strength; another to have courage; the next, speed; the others, stamina, wisdom, power. Together, the heroes' names spelled *Shazam,* a word as marvelously magical as others like *presto* and *allakazam.* The concept was a kind of take-off on the Three Musketeers except with twice as many characters. (A similar idea would become the Justice Society in DC's All-Star a few years later.)

But Ralph Daigh vetoed the concept and suggested Parker work with a single character. Parker scratched his head and went home to ponder the idea over the weekend.

Monday morning.



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Bright and early, Parker presented a revamped idea to his boss, an idea that utilized his original idea combined with a character he called Captain Thunder, a name obliquely cued by the company's founder. It looked good. Parker then wrote a thirteen-page script and included a newsboy named Billy (another subtle tie-in with Fawcett's patriarch). The next step depended on visualizing the image of Captain Thunder. Art director Al Allard gave that assignment to C. C. Beck.

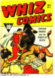
Charles Clarence Beck was a staff illustrator who had first joined the Fawcett ranks in Minneapolis, Minnesota, his home town. He was born in June 1910, and was raised in a family of teachers, ministers, and other professionals who encouraged his artistic talent. Formal training began with an art correspondence course; then to school in Layton, Minnesota, The Chicago Academy, and The University of Minnesota. In addition, Beck was a talented musician who played many instruments. Some said he played music even better than he drew.

By the time he was 23 years old, Beck had landed a job on the Fawcett payroll in Robbinsdale, Minnesota. His natural inclination toward humorous illustration kept him busy cartooning for pulps like *Hooey, Smokehouse, Squad's Riot,* and *Whiz Bang.* He had been working on a magazine about *movie stars* when the job to design a cast of comic characters was assigned to him.

With the movie job fresh in his mind, he began the task of translating Bill Parker's ideas into graphic form. He chose film star Fred MacMurray as the model for Captain Thunder, giving him the same black, wavy hair, bone structure, and cleft chin. Thunder's costume—the waist sash, the short over-the-shoulder cape, the military jacket flap, the boots, and tight pants—were inspired by a drawing he had recently done to illustrate a costume in the light operetta, The Student Prince. The lightning bolt across the chest added the comic hero touch.

Beck set to work visualizing Parker's script in the most consciously simple, straightforward style that had yet been seen in comics. He recalls his approach to the material candidly, "I never read comic books because most of them were tasteless. I considered my magazines to be illustrated boy's adventures and handled the art accordingly." Early comic strip influences were evident in Beck's style. His favorites were Little Orphan Annie and The Phantom, whose hands-on-hips pose was often repeated in Beck's own work.

The Captain Thunder 13-pager was added to several other features and produced as an "ashcan" issue, a term defining a hastily printed, black and white version for the purpose of securing a copyright on the material therein. No copies were ever sold. Before the book (designated *Whiz* 1) was registered with the copyright office in Washington, Fawcett executives decided to change the name of the lead feature to something less clamorous and uninviting. They renamed the character Captain Marvel (perhaps inspired by the success of *Marvel Mystery Comics* in the fall of 1939), and ordered a complete second issue be readied for newsstand sales. The "ashcan" issue was junked entirely, not even being used for copyright application because of


JULY No. 6
WHIZ COMICS
10¢
CAPTAIN MARVEL and the CIRCUS of DEATH

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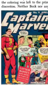
the name change.

The original Captain Thunder story was to be repeated with changes along with the other strips in *Whiz 2*. Beck re-lettered the name Captain Marvel wherever necessary and the changes were plated and soldered into the original story's engravings.

Parker created the name of The World's Maddest Scientist by combining the Indian words Siva and Nirvana. Beck pictured him as the spittin' image of his local Long Island druggist (whose real name was Horne), complete with horn-rimmed glasses, bald pate, and white pharmacist's jacket.

In those early days of comics, all the coloring was left to the printer's discretion. Neither Beck nor any of the Fawcett crew had submitted color guides for their new characters. Taking his lead from the lightning bolt, the printer's colorist tastefully added red and yellow hues to Beck's outlines, putting the final finishing touches to the newly born Captain Marvel.


No. 9 APRIL 3
Captain Marvel
10¢
CAPTAIN MARVEL'S OWN BOOK 68 Pages of SMASHING ACTION

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Before the first book hit the stands, Beck was hard at work producing the next two issues. He did the complete job—pencilling on illustration board, inking with a number 5 or 7 sable brush, even lettering captions and balloons by himself. Then Fawcett realized they had a hit on their hands and assigned Beck the task of producing *Special Edition Comics* in addition to *Whiz*. Pete Costanza, who had collaborated with Beck on *Whiz* filler features, primarily Spy Smasher, became chief assistant.

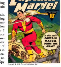
Then Bill Parker left Fawcett on October 15, 1940 to serve his National Guard duty. When he returned to the company staff in November, 1945, he by-passed the comics for a job on Fawcett's *Today's Woman Magazine* and later became editor of *Mechanix Illustrated*. Ed Herron took his place as comics editor on October 10, 1940. John Beardsley joined him as co-editor beginning April 12, 1941.

Beck's output remained constant for almost a year, then new books with more Captain Marvel stories were required. Without mentioning it to Beck, the first issue of *Captain Marvel Adventures* had been commissioned by Herron to an outside source. That source was Jack Kirby.

Kirby drew four complete stories, a total of sixty-two pages for the book, in mid-1940. The art was devoid of any detail, was very cartoony, and appeared to have been done quite hastily; but the action was unmistakably Kirby and so were the background characters. Just as obvious was the fact that someone other than Kirby had inked the job.

Herron had come from the midwest and sold his first comic scripts in 1939 to Fox editor, Joe Simon, for fifty cents apiece. He later received $1.50 per page in the Chesler shop. He began freelancing for other publishers, including Fawcett, when the editorial position was offered him on the basis of several excellent Captain Marvel scripts he had written. He accepted and was responsible for a number of major events in the Marvel saga. He created the first of the group's offspring, Captain Marvel, Jr. More important, Herron was instrumental in bringing about the union of a pair of superior talents, two men responsible for changing the course of comic history —C. C. Beck and Otto Binder.

Binder was a top-name science fiction author who had broken into comics to supplement his income from pulp short stories and novels.


No. 12 JUNE 25
Captain Marvel
10¢
In this Issue: CAPTAIN MARVEL JOINS THE ARMY

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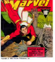
In the beginning, he had freelanced for the Harry "A" Chesler Studio, the first of the production shops to supply packaged comic art to publishing houses. Artists and writers defined them with the term "sweat shops." His brother, Jack Binder, was the shop foreman who had invited him to try his imaginative, fast-moving prose in the embryonic comic medium.

October 1939, marked Otto Binder's debut with a script for Chesler Publications new sci-fi strip, Dan Hastings. During the following eighteen months, he composed thrillers for a host of new characters like Power Nelson, Vulcan, The Black Owl, and Captain America. Then, in March 1941, Ed Herron gave him his first Fawcett assignment, Captain Venture. During the remainder of the year, Binder fashioned the careers of every Fawcett hero from Bulletman to El Carim. Finally, Herron took him aside and spoke the words that reshaped Binder's life (and possibly everyone in the entire Fawcett Corporation also):

"Okay, Otto! You're ready for Captain Marvel!"

And Captain Marvel was ready for him. During the next twelve years, Binder scripted 451 Captain Marvel stories out of a possible 618. He produced 69 Mary Marvel tales out of a total of 98, 162 Marvel Family Adventures, and 161 Captain Marvel, Jr. yarns. His combined Marvel scripts from 1941 to 1953 numbered 986 stories out of a possible 1743.


GIANT PORTRAIT OF CAPTAIN MARVEL PAGE 34
No. 11
Captain Marvel Adventures
10¢

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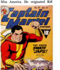
In other words, OTTO BINDER WROTE A STAGGERING 57% OF THE ENTIRE MARVEL SAGA!!! There's more.

He authored his first Captain Marvel tale in August 1941 as a text story for the Big Little Book, *Return Of The Scorpion*. He scored a total of 84 two-page text fillers about JON JARL, Space Cop in *Captain Marvel Adventures*. In addition, he penned 352 scripts for other Fawcett superhero strips. He turned out over 2,000 more stories for 20 publishers, wrote about 93 different heroes, appeared in 198 magazine titles! Get ready . . . ALMOST 50,000 PAGES OF COMICS!!!

Broken down into categories, it's even more astonishing. Binder's barrage gave birth to a brigade of new comic characters starting with Fawcett's Mary Marvel, Marvel Family, Tawky Tawny, Mr. Mind, Oggar, Sivana Jr., Georgia Sivana, Sivana Family, and the Jon Jarl series. For Timely he created Captain Wonder, The Young Allies, Tommy Tyme and Miss America. He originated Kid Eternity and Uncle Sam for Quality, and Captain Battle and Cloud Curtis for Friday Publications. In the Canadian Anglo-American books, he launched Commander Steel, The Purple Rider, Terry Kane, The Crusaders, and Rocket Rex. He kicked off Iron Munro and Scott Rand for Chesler. For Street and Smith, he developed Astounding Man and revived Little Nemo.



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Collaborating with DC editors, he launched a legion of books and strips based on Lois Lane, Jimmy Olsen, The Bizzaros, Supergirl, Merry-Girl of 1,000 Gimmicks, Tommy Tomorrow, The Legion of Super Heroes, Superman's Green and Yellow Sun Tales, The Map of Krypton, Untold Tales of Superboy, and Krypto the Superdog.

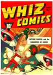
In the 60's, Binder created Mighty Samson for Gold Key. For Harvey he originated The Man From Sram, Robo-Link, The Saucerer, My Pal—Alien, Super Surplus, Campy Champ, and Unmighty Boy.

The already established characters he wrote for set another all-time record. For Fawcett: Captain Venture, Spy Smasher, Golden Arrow, Dr. Voodoo, Phantom Eagle, Radar, El Carim, Mr. Scarlet, Bulletman, Ibis, Commando Yank, Minute Man, Lance O'Casey, Captain Midnight, Don Winslow, Hopalong Cassidy, Gabby Hayes, Rocky Lane, Billy the Kid, Ken Maynard, Rod Cameron, Benny Beaver, and Hoppy—The Marvel Bunny. Binder also adapted a half dozen films into comic book novels.

For Quality, he scribed The Doll-man, Black Condor, Espionage, and The Blackhawks. For Timely, Binder wrote Captain America, Sub-Mariner, Destroyer, Sgt. Dix, Blonde Phantom, Tuk, The Terror, Human Torch, The Whizzer, Subbie, All-

Winners Squad, Let's Play Detective, Mitzi, Georgie, Hedy Devine, Jeanie, and Nellie the Nurse.

For DC, he scripted Hawkman, Robotman, Johnny Quick, Green Arrow, Superman, Aquaman, Shining Knight, Superboy, Star-Spangled Kid and Captain Compass plus a score of mystery and S-F tales in a dozen different titles.


WHIZ COMICS
10¢
CAPTAIN MARVEL and the SQUADRON OF DOOM

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More Binder blasts were aimed at the Black Hood, Hangman, The Shield, Steel Sterling, Dynamic Man, Satan, Dan Hastings, Power Nelson, The Black Owl, Vulcan, Marvo, Lone Warrior, Doc Strange, Ajax, Doc Savage, Red Rover, Vic Verity, Don Fortune, Young King Cole, Blue Bolt, The Targeteers, Wild Bill Pecos, Lobo–Wild Boy, Rex King, Broken Arrow, Dr. Solar, The Rocketeers, Spyman, Pirana, Master of Magic, The Man in Black, Beeman, Jigsaw and others.

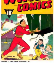
In addition, Binder kept busy feeding publishers like Dell, Ziff-Davis, and Standard with non-character stories. For EC Comics, he contributed 27 science fiction and horror thrillers and a handful of *Mad* items. All this, of course, is just Binder's comic book wordage. As one of the more prominent American science fiction writers, he was a word-seer who helped create an art form in its dawning era. During this genesis (1932-1942), Binder composed an engrossingly imaginative and prophetic shape of things to come in the form of 218 stories which totaled 2.5 MILLION WORDS.

Critics and readers alike celebrated Binder masterpieces like the unforgettable *Adam Link* stories, *Anton York–Immortal*, the *"Via"* series, and novels like *Dusk to Dawn* and *Lords of Creation*. Each an authentic classic in its own right–together an uncontestably brilliant legacy of word-concepts and philosophies of a romantic visionary-scientist.

Otto Oscar Binder was born on August 26, 1911, in Bessemer, Michigan, the last of six children. His father emigrated from Austria in 1906, bringing a family of six to America in 1910. After moving several times, the family finally settled in Chicago in 1922.

Like most boys in their early teens, Otto read the works of Robert Louis Stevenson, H. G. Wells, and Jules Verne. The thought of writing fiction never occured to him.

Then, in 1926, the first issue of *Amazing Stories* hit the stands and literally changed the lives of the Binder family. Otto was 15 when he bought the first copy and read it from cover to cover. From then on he never missed an issue. His older brother, Earl, shared his enthusiasm for this new type of literature called "pseudo - science" stories. Several years later, they joined The Chicago Science Fiction League and met S-F novelist Otis Adlebert Kline. This sudden immersion into the realm of the fantastic prompted Earl to try his hand at writing a few ideas of his own. Otto typed the hand-written manuscripts and slowly began making changes here and there, generally polishing up the finished jobs.



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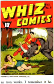
In no time they began collaborating, swapping ideas and getting them down on paper as fast as possible. They decided the team needed a pen-name and set about the task. A pen-name, a pen-name? Suddenly, Earl had it! Why didn't they combine their initials E and O? Eando Binder–why not? It had a rather strange sound which seemed appropriate for a science fiction author.

Now they began in earnest. Keeping their brother Jack from sleeping, the boys worked late at night accompanied only by their mother alternately begging and threatening them to stop burning the midnight oil and go to bed. A mountain of manuscripts began to push Jack's clothes off the closet shelves. They relentlessly mailed their stories to publisher after publisher amassing a growing heap of rejection slips and a postage bill tallying $105. No sale!

Otto had graduated from high school and just started college in 1930 when he was notified that their manuscript, *The First Martian*, was accepted for publication in *Amazing Stories*–at 1/4¢ a word. They were ecstatic! Little did they realize that the story wouldn't be used until 1932, and that they wouldn't be paid until two years after that. Still they kept sending in their stories, most of which were sent back with rejection slips. Robert Heinlein gave them this advice: "Never rewrite a story if it's rejected–instead, change the title and retype the first page so it'll look new when you send it out again. You'll find one editor's poison is another editor's pleasure."

They continued to produce a volume of words describing the future as they saw it. "I went to college for two and a half years," Otto recalls, "then had to get a job because the family was in danger of losing the house during the depression. I wanted to be a chemical engineer or a research scientist but these hopes gradually eroded away. Things got so bad, the college I was going to went bankrupt."

For the next few years, Otto worked at a series of jobs from office boy to salesman, his best pay–$45 a month. "Earl was in even worse shape. He was married and had a daughter, and no job. A single want ad in a newspaper would draw a thousand men. All over the city they would stand in long lines, waiting all day for a job. I even hate to think of it. Earl was finally hired in an iron works. I remember it because he described it so vividly. He'd say, "All day long I forge, weld, and hammer those damn chains–miles of chains–for $14 a week!"



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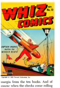
"I began doing most of the writing then. My scientist dream had burst by that time. I worked up such a mountainous pile of manuscripts that by sheer weight of numbers, they began to sell."

Then, in December 1935, Otis Kline hired Otto as an agent to be in charge of his New York literary office, replacing Kline's son, Allen. (Otto and two other S-F fans had voyaged to the big city that June, meeting a number of editors and writers like Mort Weisinger, Julie Schwartz, Lawrence Manning, A. Merritt, Orlin Tremaine, and Hugo Gernsback.)

A portion of his first letter to his brothers at home read:

"If Mother is doing any worrying that I am not getting enough to eat, or enough sleep, you can tell her to stop, because I can live like a king (or at least a prince) on the ten dollars a week that Kline sends me regularly. Room–$2.50, good eats–50¢ a day, carfare maybe a dollar a week, so that leaves me a good margin from the ten bucks. And of course when the checks come rolling in (if they don't, I've figured this thing all wrong), why, I'll be sending money home.


WHIZ COMICS
NOV. No. 10
10¢
CAPTAIN MARVEL battles the WINGED DEATH

Copyright © 1940 Fawcett Publications, Inc.

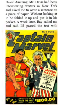
"From three days of delivery work, I already know the city like a book. It is absurdly simple once you get the drift. So far I have met Fred Clayton of *Argosy* (at his home–he is a prince), Joe Shaw of *Black Mask*, and Miss McChesney of *Five Novels*. Next week I have appointments with four editors.

"I have been introduced by Allen Kline to a variety of eating places and foods: the Automat for delicious chicken pies, the Shiek (Syrian restaurant) for roasted lamb's head with Leben, (a most entrancing fermented milk-food), Jewish places for genuine soup and stuffed lung and gefillte fish (dammit, it's good), and a little old German eating place where they serve more than you can eat for 35¢, and where you get spots in your eyes from the glare of shiny brass and metal, that's how clean a place it is. He guided me also to a Syrian pastry shop where his friends stuffed me with twenty different kinds of exotic, delectable cakes and pastries–all for nothing! I'm going to have a five-lb. tin of those oriental pastries made up and send it to Mother, to give her an idea of what kind of food I eat now that I'm away."

Binder was paid $10 a week against any commissions he might earn at the tiny office on 34th Street and 10th Avenue. Just like everything else, business was bad and both he and Kline were glad to call it quits after almost two years. Now in close contact with all the science-fiction pulp editors, Binder began a steady stream of sales for his own stories.

"For a few years I sold more words than any other S-F author, but I never wanted to be a writer. I felt I had just enough ability to beat out the herd. I sold to Gernsback's *Amazing* and *Science Wonder* in 1933; they bought reams of my stuff including those long serials like *Enslaved Brains* and *Dawn to Dusk*. They both paid poorly. At one point, Gernsback owed me $780–and at 1/4¢ a word that's quite a lot of words.

"Then *Thrilling Wonder* came out in 1936, edited by Mort Weisinger. It gave us all–Ed Hamilton, Henry Kuttner, myself–a place to work. My *Hormone Menace* was in the first issue. Ray Palmer also bought quite a few of my stories for Ziff-Davis' *Amazing*. Mr. Davis had been interviewing writers in New York and asked me to write a sentence on a piece of paper. Without looking at it, he folded it up and put it in his pocket. A week later, Ray called me and said I'd passed the test with flying colors. Davis was a handwriting analyst who selected his men that way. He told Ray to buy everything I wrote.



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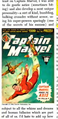
"My brother Jack had moved to New York and eventually joined the Harry "A" Chesler shop as art director. It was then I was seduced into the comics!" Binder's first scripts for Chesler led to his link-up with Fawcett. For openers, editor Ed Herron groomed Binder on minor strips like Captain Venture and Golden Arrow before giving him Fawcett's super star. Up to this time, Binder was turning out comic scripts exactly like dozens of other writers. Suddenly he began making comic history.

"Comics were like a drug, or a hypnotic spell, to me," Binder recalls. "The moment I began writing them (after I had turned a deaf ear to my brother Jack for a year), I was a captive of this new and colorful way of telling stories. Simple stories, yes, sometimes hardly any story between the 'must' action. But still, at least on Captain Marvel, I was able to do gentle satire (sometimes biting) and also develop a most unique personality–a sort of kind, bumbling, hulking crusader without armor, using his super-powers sparingly (one of the secrets of his success) and subject to all the whims and dreams and human fallacies which are part of all of us. I'd hate to add up how many times Billy saved him with his wits. The Big Red Cheese was human to the core, whereas, in my opinion most of the other super-characters, from Mr. Big (blue suit) down, were alien, almost austere, infallible, haughty–doing a machine-like job of nabbing crooks and crushing evil, without once taking off a moment to lounge around and relax.



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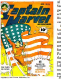
"Superman was a personality too. But Captain Marvel was a person. And yet both were neck-and-neck with superfeats. One of our greatest games in those days was to think of new kinds of super-action after lifting ocean liners and poking holes in dams with fingers were overdone.

"Of course, there is no question that the man who really made Captain Marvel was the inimitable Charles Clarence Beck. His bold line style, his innate humorous touches (a crook socked upside down saying id'TEH the same way) made the Captain something living–on paper. Yet he never neglected Captain Marvel's brawn, it was always there, waiting, threatening, ready to go. Beck and I always called him the 'Big Red Cheese', not in disrespect, but as a friend . . . and because sneaky little Sivana always used it too."


AUG.
Captain Marvel Adventures
10¢
WAR STAMPS FOR VICTORY
68 PAGES IN FULL COLOR STARRING CAPTAIN MARVEL

Copyright © [illegible] Fawcett Publications, Inc.

The team of Binder and Beck were comic dynamite! Up to that time, Captain Marvel must be considered as being in his developing stages because after the collaboration he hit his full potential, becoming the hottest-selling super hero of the golden age.

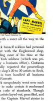
At the time, Beck was earning $35 a week for his staff job. When he divided the number of pages he produced weekly into his salary, he realized to his dismay that his actual page rate only came to a few dollars each. Though he was oblivious of what kind of profits were being made from his efforts on Captain Marvel, Beck knew his product was worth more and asked for an increase in pay. Instead, the company gave him a masthead credit as Chief Artist.

In place of a raise, Al Allard suggested Beck open an art studio of his own and freelance his comic jobs to Fawcett. Why not? It seemed financially sound. Beck opened his New York shop in 1941. He was located at Broadway and 40th Street in a small studio along with a few other artists including Pete Costanza.

As the demand for more Captain Marvel adventures increased, so did the staff at Beck's shop. They took on other books and advertising accounts like Tootsie Roll, for whom Beck produced CAPTAIN TOOTSIE, one of the best story-on-a-single-page ads to appear in comics. Early in 1944, a Canadian outfit called The Anglo-American Publishing Company contacted Beck about creating a new line of comics for them. (Paper was more accessible in Canada than it was here just as the war ended.)

To take on this new account, Beck opened another studio in Englewood, New Jersey, where rent was considerably cheaper than in Manhattan. Pete Costanza acted as the shop's art director. Ed Robbins and Al Fagley were the top layout men. Simultaneously the Binder shop began to close down and many of his artists joined Beck's staff. Jack Binder himself worked there for awhile.

Page rates were set at $52–$56 for the art and $2 for the lettering. All scripts came from Fawcett, bought from their writers at $10 a comic book page. Binder's first scripts for Chesler had sold at $5 for a complete script. His early Fawcett stories paid $3 per page, then, in a few months, $4. By 1943, page rates were up to $6. The following year Fawcett paid a minimum of $100 for any story up to 7 pages and thereafter $16 a page. "That year," Binder says, "I made $17,500 writing for comics, believe it or not. My wife, Iona just couldn't run to the bank fast enough–checks were just pouring in. All the writers at that time called it 'The Golden Rut' with a sneer all the way to the bank."



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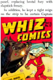
Beck himself seldom had personal contact with the Englewood shop, spending most of his time at the New York address (which was primarily a business office). Costanza carefully reported the proceedings of the shop's 20 to 30 artists to Beck, who in turn handled all business with Fawcett.

Beck scrupulously went over each script to make certain it conformed to his code of standards. Though other artists layed-out, pencilled, and inked the Captain Marvel stories in the manner he had created, Beck vigilantly edited every page, frequently redrawing the heads of Marvel and Billy Batson to eliminate any deviation from the original concept.

None of the Fawcett artists or writers got residuals for their work though Captain Marvel was used for merchandising everything from suspenders to toys. Beck seldom made up to $200 a week and generally averaged much less. He continued to maintain the studios during the duration of Fawcett's comic output, finally closing the operation in 1953.

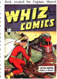
Beck must qualify not only as *the* Captain Marvel artist, but as his unofficial editor also. All during the life of the strip, Beck insisted on a unifying control over it. He continually changed scripts to conform to his own personal comics code. He edited violence and action scenes to suit his own concept of good taste and judgment. He'd never draw a punch actually landing on a jaw, only the before and after of the blow. "I let them imagine the violence," he revealed. Beck even deigned to allow the strip's star to fly head-on at the reader because he felt the impact of the shot might be too jarring. He often compressed a series of action scenes into a single panel, replacing brutal fury with slapstick frenzy.

In addition, he kept a tight reign on the strip to be certain Captain Marvel didn't exceed his conceptual limits. Contradictions were kept to a minimum. Beck often had to fight his editors and writers to maintain the level of quality he envisioned. But in the end, he always won out. The results were a superior product.


WHIZ COMICS
No. 17
10¢
CAPT. MARVEL Knocks Out a Tank!
Copyright © 1941 Fawcett Publications, Inc.

Though he fell well within the classic American super-hero framework, Captain Marvel was one of the few characters that took on a life of his own. Beck's essential style can be best described as his insistence on recording the action of the story as clearly as possible. Though they were never graced by beauty, Beck's panels suggested a quality of relaxed spaciousness that made each story read with an ease few other strips ever attained. The drama inevitably took place in a single foreground plane with a minimum depth of field.

Beck's simplistic rendering served a dual function during the life of the strip. First, it engaged the reader with its basic common denominator appearance. Second, the linear style Beck created for Captain Marvel was easily imitated—an asset of enormous value when considering the number of artists required to produce the necessary volume of work. This single factor resulted in the strip's unusual consistancy over the years. Compared with that of Beck, the art of Kirby, Crandall, and even Shuster was an infinite complexity as others who had to copy those artists discovered. That, of course, was the reason Superman, Batman, and others featured a wide spectrum of variations weakening the impact of the total image. Not so with Captain Marvel.

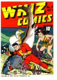

WHIZ COMICS
10¢
CAPTAIN MARVEL Mightiest of Mortals!
Copyright © 1941 Fawcett Publications, Inc.

To a lesser degree, the writing took on a similar aspect simply because Binder handled the bulk of Marvel's wordage. His once-upon-a-timers might be viewed in retrospect as folksy, low-key adventures as contrasted to Timely's pervasive climate of fear or National's focus on ultimate power. Binder's Big Red Cheese was Captain Corn all the way and kids were crazy about it!

Binder began producing more and more Marvel scripts as the demand skyrocketed (with *Whiz* being published as a bi-weekly for awhile). Though Fawcett had a policy which forbade editors from buying stories they wrote themselves, Ed Herron waived the rule and began circuitously using his own stuff. Knowing it might even jeopardize his job, he wrote the scripts right in the Fawcett offices, in the middle of a dozen employees who could easily have noticed. In fact, Herron and John Beardsley both began writing scripts which they secretly bought from themselves, considering the deception to be a scandalously amusing practical joke on the company. To polish off the escapade, they invented a mythical writer (to sign checks) which they named Billy Batstone, an outrageous burlesque that stood out like a beacon and shouted to be discovered.

Herron was also a compulsive Monopoly player. He would wear out the Binder brothers with epic Monopoly games that would begin in the afternoon and continue all through the night. Herron's contribution to the Marvel saga was considerable and even his "bootleg" scripts were top-notch. Fawcett execs took a dim view of his shenanigans when they finally discovered his "dual identity" and discharged him on March 1, 1942. He left for the service in 1943.

After Herron, Binder and Beardsley shared editorship of Fawcett's comic line. But after six weeks Binder decided he preferred free-lancing to editing and resigned his post. Beardsley quit the same day, May 12, 1942, to join the Quality Publications staff. Rod Reed replaced them both.



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Reed was an ex-press agent who started his comic career while still in high school, working as a copy boy for the *Buffalo Evening News.*

"I wrote my first dialogue for a syndicated comic strip when I was still in high school, and serving as a copy boy on *Evening News.* The strip was 'Gasoline Alley.'

"Walt had married Phyllis in the strip and they were going to have a b-a-b-y. The *News* hadn't minded on February 14, 1921, when Skeezix arrived in a basket on bachelor Walt Wallet's doorstep. But they didn't think a p-r-e-g-n-a-n-t woman, even though legally married, was suitable for the funny papers.

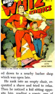
"So, as the hour of confinement approached and characters began talking about the forthcoming blessed event, my job was to rewrite their dialogue so they'd be talking about something else—something 'innocent' as it were. My balloons were pasted over the ones that came from the syndicate and if Buffalo readers ever suspected that Mrs. Wallet was that way, it wasn't my fault.

"Presently, when the pictures became such that no dialogue could disguise what was going on, the strip was dropped until the crisis had passed. I suppose many Western New Yorkers think Corky was found in a basket, too."

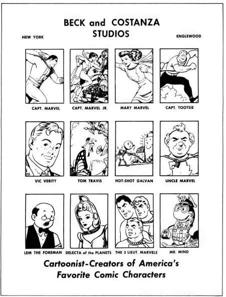
For awhile Reed was a columnist and reporter for the *Buffalo Times,* then decided to try his luck at free-lance press agenting. During that time, he moonlighted as editor of a Fawcett cartoon magazine titled *Squad's Riot.* Soon he was invited to work full time on two additional titles, and finally as comics editor on September 22, 1941. Reed's direction and sense of humor tracked up perfectly with those of Binder and Beck—the result was another two years of first class Captain Marvel adventures.

Reed left June 15, 1943 when he expected to be drafted (he wasn't!). Instead of returning to the comics, he joined the staff at *Downbeat Magazine.* During that period, he produced over 100 of the most humorous Captain Marvel scripts. He relinquished his position to Will Lieberson who had also come up through the ranks of the humor magazines which preceeded the comics.

Because of their ever-increasing popularity, Lieberson had even more comic titles to contend with than the previous editors. The job was tougher, so he worked harder. After one particularly grueling week and an all-day Friday session that lasted after hours, Lieberson wearily trudged down to a nearby barber shop which was open late.


CAPT. MARVEL 10¢
WHIZ COMICS
No. 22
OCT. 3
CAPTAIN MARVEL and his MARVEL FAMILY
Copyright © 1941 Fawcett Publications, Inc.

He sank into an empty chair, requested a shave and tried to relax. Then he noticed a kid sitting opposite him, reading a comic, one of his own books. Will smiled, pleased. The kid began to read the book aloud—across the top panels of the pages, eliminating the lower two-thirds of every page. Stunned, but



**BECK and COSTANZA STUDIOS**

NEW YORK

ENGLEWOOD

CAPT. MARVEL
CAPT. MARVEL JR.
MARY MARVEL
CAPT. TOOTSIE

VIC VERITY
TOM TRAVIS
HOT-SHOT GALVAN
UNCLE MARVEL

LEM THE FOREMAN
DELECTA of the PLANETS
THE 3 LIEUT. MARVELS
MR. MIND

***Cartoonist-Creators of America's Favorite Comic Characters***

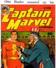
A Beck and Costanza Studio promotional brochure from the mid-1940's.

doing his best to keep his sanity in check, Lieberson rose from his chair and gently explained that the book should be read down each page to get the whole story.

The kid stopped and looked him straight in the eye. "I know, but this way it's faster!"

There are those who say Lieberson was never the same afterward. "It almost destroyed me," he confessed.

On July 16, 1944, Lieberson, as editorial director of Fawcett's entire comic line, hired Wendell Crowley, Captain Marvel's last major editor. Otto Binder summed up his recollections of the Captain Marvel crew and the Golden age era fondly:


Captain Marvel
ADVENTURES
10¢
68 PAGES IN FULL COLOR STARRING CAPT. MARVEL

Copyright © 1942 Fawcett Publications, Inc.

"All of us lived, ate, and dreamed comics in the Golden Era. No sooner did two of us get together (or one, if he liked to talk to himself) than off we went on which characters were best—that crazy Jack Kirby's layouts—Eisner, who can beat him—hey, did Jack's shop do 2,000 or 3,000 pages last month—I think I'll be glad when I'm drafted and get a 'rest'.

"We even had baseball and bowling parties in which all the comics people at Fawcett's were invited—editors, writers, artists, letterers. We changed off houses (usually in Jersey or Long Island), piled up beer and liquor, then played star (?) baseball in the local public stadium. Or, we'd change to a bowling alley and keep it going all day. Then, come evening, we all settled down and—well, you won't believe it—sang songs. Wives and girl-friends were all there too, of course. Those were some of the most enjoyable party events in my life. We all had a camaraderie and *esprit de corps*—or maybe just drunks liking company—that made us one happy family. No two Golden Age guys can get together these days and talk about those shindigs without pulling out his hanky. You know, so much dust in the air."

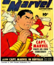
Captain Marvel continued as one of the biggest stars in the comic universe. In the middle 40's when most super-heroes were dying from exposure and exhaustion, the magnificent Marvel was coming on stronger than ever. Issue 51, January 1946, hit a record circulation sale of 1,384,000. Just a glimpse or two was all it took to convince comic-readers to come back for more. In fact, just a glimpse or two was all it took to convince the publishers of Superman that Captain Marvel was more than just a simple second-rater.

They took a long look at the bulging biceps, the cape and boots and, way back on September 5, 1941, instigated a law suit against Fawcett Publications which hung over their heads like Shazam's great stone block.

Holy Moley!!

Though an amended complaint was filed in November 1945, the action was not brought to trial until March 1948. Superman, Inc. claimed that Captain Marvel was an infringement of their copyrighted material and thus was unfair competition. In addition, they charged Republic Pictures (who produced the Marvel serial) with a similiar claim.

The battle lines were drawn! The two adversaries eyed each others colorful tights and super-physiques with trepidation! The fight of the century was about to begin! Ladies and gentlemen, your attention to the center ring . . . the Man of Steel vs. the World's Mightiest Mortal!!!



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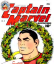
A battery of lawyers squared off for the conflict. Superman took no chances and engaged one of the country's most prominent and successful lawyers, Louis Nizer.

Superman's counsel presented its case, citing the many similarities between the two heroes. Captain Marvel's attorneys rebutted the charge by claiming that Superman had not been properly copyrighted in the first place which in turn had resulted in the abandonment of the copyrights. Their contention was that the McClure Syndicate, who ran the Superman newspaper strips, had not properly affixed the copyright notices and consequently lost the rights to the character.

Scores of witnesses were summoned to testify for and against both sides. The official court statement recorded it briefly:

"The evidence as to actual copying is conflicting. Plaintiff called some of the employees of Fawcett just referred to. They testified to instructions from their superiors to imitate the 'Superman' strips and the dialogue and script as closely as possible, and that they did so. Fawcett called their superiors, who denied having given any such instructions and denied any copying. An independent artist testified to admissions by Beck, Fawcett's chief artist, who drew the first 'Captain Marvel' cartoons, as to his having copied 'Superman'. Beck however, denied having made any such admission. Experts were called by both parties, who contradicted each other as to the significance of claimed similarities and dissimilarities between the portrayals of the two characters, their facial appearances, costumes, etc., and the superhuman feats performed by them. It would serve no useful purpose to recite in detail the conflicting testimony, for I am satisfied from all the evidence that there was actual copying."



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Nevertheless, when the final disposition of the case was decided, the judge ruled in favor of Fawcett and dismissed the complaint:

"I find, therefore, that the publication of the McClure syndicated newspaper strips without proper copyright notices resulted in the abandonment by plaintiff of the copyrights on the 'Action Comics' stories. With this disposition it is unnecessary to consider any of the other instances in which the 'Superman' stories or the 'Superman' figure were published without proper copyright notices.

### Unfair Competition

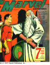
"The evidence does not justify any finding of unfair competition by either Fawcett or Republic; there is no proof either of palming off or of confusion; nor is there any misrepresentation, or any misappropriation of what equitably belongs to a competitor."

Shazam! Captain Marvel had won!!

Superman's lawyers hit the roof and while they were there, appealed to a higher court. In the meantime, the magnificent Marvel continued appearing regularly on the newsstands.

He appeared in *Whiz*, *Captain Marvel Adventures*, *America's Greatest Comics*, *The Marvel Family*, in reprints in *Holiday*, *Gift*, and *Xmas*, the world's largest comic, a mammoth 324 pages. (These last three titles were not reissues with the original contents being rebound beneath a new cover. Though a number of publishers did this, they were reprintings with minor changes being made from the original magazines, primarily on the advertising matter.)

Captain Marvel could also be found in *All Hero Comics*, *Captain Midnight*, *Funny Animals*, *Master Comics* and others. He guest-starred as a cross-over character in just about every feature Fawcett ever published. There was a one-shot titled *Captain Marvel and the Good Humor Man*; a series of *Captain Marvel Story Books*, a hybrid format which incorporated comic book, Big Little Book and pulp magazine, using all left-hand pages in large comic panels illustrating the text; and *Captain Marvel and the Return of the Scorpion*, a Big Little Book-type publication (or more accurately, an imitation of the Dell *Fast Action Books*), called *Dime Action Books* by Fawcett. They featured a page of text about 4 x 5 inches opposite a single black and white illustration. Fawcett issued only three others—*Spy Smasher*, *Bulletman* and *Minute-Man*.



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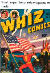
The *Dime Action Book* was a sequel to the Captain Marvel Republic movie serial, which starred Tom Tyler and Frank Coughlin Jr. as Cap and Billy. In the film, the Scorpion was killed. Surprisingly, in the end, Billy was deprived of his power to become Captain Marvel, making a sequel rather unlikely. The serial featured the ultimate in flying scenes and action stuntwork. Though Beck viewed the film as a "total disaster," it endures as the finest super hero extravaganza ever made.



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All through the Captain Marvel saga, his chief foe was Dr. Sivana, self-styled Rightful Ruler of the Universe, and termed editorially the World's Wickedest Scientist and the World's Maddest Scientist. The bald-headed gnome was in every one of those various "first" issues, all the way through to the last issue of *Captain Marvel Adventures* 150, November 1953.

Sivana's goals in life were simple: (1–To become the Rightful Ruler of the Universe in fact as well as name. (2–To humiliate, discredit and ultimately to kill Captain Marvel. (3–To spread horror, terror, and nastiness throughout the cosmos. As W. C. Fields might say, "A man like that can't be all bad."

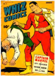
*Whiz Comics* 15, April 1941, featured the origin of Sivana. His daughter, Beautia, explained: "Back in the early part of the century, Sivana was one of the most brilliant and promising young scientists in Europe." A flashback revealed the young black-haired Sivana addressing a group of businessmen. "Gentlemen, I am convinced that my inventions will revolutionize industry."

The chubby manufacturer was not impressed. "Revoloozionize industry? But dot's chust vot ve dond't vant to do." For years, he tried to improve the lot of mankind and was rejected at every turn. Growing gray (and bald) Sivana took his two tiny children to the planet Venus in a rocket-ship of his design. There he raised them against considerable hardship as he planned revenge on a world that had rejected him.

Besides his daughter, Beautia, Sivana had a son named Magnificus, a blond, Greek God type, strong enough to give even Captain Marvel a good fight. Little was heard of him. In later years, Sivana produced two more offspring who closely resembled him: Sivana, Jr., a red-haired younger version of himself who battled Captain Marvel, Jr. and dark-haired, homely Georgia Sivana, who caused trouble for Mary Marvel. Those two younger Sivanas were so inhuman they may have been merely androids created in the old doctor's laboratory (although no such explanation was ever offered).

The only other villain Captain Marvel ever fought on such a grand scale actually appeared in only one story—but the story was serialized over 25 issues of *Captain Marvel Adventures*, from March 1943 to May 1945.

His name was Mr. Mind. He was so incredibly evil that he had Sivana working for him as one of his benchmen, a mere flunkie! Other stooges included Captain Nazi, Nippo the Nipponese, Mr. Banjo, various crocodile-headed men and other monsters. They were all part of Mr. Mind's Monster Society of Evil.



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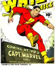
In the first few episodes we never saw the mysterious Mr. Mind. He was only a voice coming from a radio speaker, ordering his troops to attack Captain Marvel. In the opening episode, Billy was covering the arrival of Princess Dareena Rajabuti who was bringing two sacred and magical black pearls to America to donate to the war effort. Under orders from Mr. Mind, Captain Nazi and a monstrous villian named Ibac tried to steal them. Captain Marvel fought the two of them, and learned of Mr. Mind and his demoniac Monster Society. He made fast work of Captain Nazi. Ibac escaped with the pearls, and with the World's Mightiest Mortal not far behind. The great serial was off on its momentous course.

In following chapters, Captain Marvel (as Billy) escaped in the nick of time from a cannibals' cooking pot ("There's no mistake about it, Billy Batson is really in hot water this time!"), prevented Nippo from creating a second disaster at Pearl Harbor, used the magic pearls to tune in a vision of Sivana's plot to change the Earth's poles around so America would be as cold as the Arctic, escaped from a block of ice where Sivana had frozen him, and utilized the magic pearls to show the way to Mr. Mind's hideout on "a dark unknown world out near the moon".


WHIZ COMICS
10¢
COMING AT YOU CAPT. MARVEL
AND

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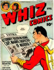
Captain Marvel crashed into Mr. Mind's palace, knowing he would be in for the toughest fight of his life. He heard his adversary's voice coming from "a cross between a billy-goat and a human" and he flattened the creature with a single punch. Then the voice came from a giant robot, and later a human-faced octopus, both of which were eventually clobbered. Next the voice came from the very air itself. The Mighty Marvel changed back to Billy to lure Mr. Mind into the open. He strolled through the old castle, brushing cobwebs and a tiny worm from his clothes, just before he was seized by a pair of powerful hands. But he managed to say the magic word just before he was overcome by an anesthetic gas. As Captain Marvel, he slugged it out for hours with a hulking handle-bar mustached fighter, demolishing the castle during the battle. Finally his opponent was stretched out. Yet Mr. Mind spoke on, threatening to resume his war on civilization from the Earth. Our hero was left standing with egg on his face, so to speak.


WHIZ COMICS
APRIL
10¢
EXTRA
ATTORNEY KILLED IN HOME CAPT. MARVEL SUSPECTED OF MURDER!!
CAPTAIN MARVEL AND THE SEVEN LEAGUE BOOTS
SPY SMASHER · · · IBIS · · · GOLDEN ARROW

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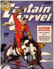
Finally, in Chapter VI, *Captain Marvel Adventures* 27, we learned that the diabolic Mr. Mind was the worm that Billy had brushed from his shoulder in the previous issue—an intelligent worm from outer space who wore spectacles and a tiny radio around his neck to amplify his speaking voice. Captain Marvel was taking no chances with the little fiend, and prepared to crush him beneath his boot. But Mr. Mind sent a telepathic command to a bird who scooped him up and flew away.

In later issues the evil worm tried a number of devilish schemes: stopping the rotation of the Earth so America would freeze in perpetual night; moving the Great Wall of China to crush armies of Chinese freedom fighters; wiping out Russia with one shell fired from the gigantic cannon called Great Big Bertha; literally trying to blow the Earth apart into two separate sections, one free, one Axis. All were horrendous schemes, all foiled by the World's Mightiest Mortal. But Mr. Mind seemed to be running out of really evil ideas.

Toward the end, he tried sabotaging a movie being made in Hollywood, then attempted to print his own propaganda book like *Mein Kampf* (one of Hitler's first steps, not his last resort). The strain was beginning to tell on the little demon. When he had one of his thugs disguise himself as Captain Marvel and the real Captain Marvel showed up in his place, Mr. Mind said, "Wonderful, Bonzo! You look almost exactly like that big red gorilla—in fact you look so real that—No, no, no, no! I'm just being an old worry bug!" He had reason to worry.

Finally, a fall on his head did it—Mr. Mind lost his mind. Or at least his memory. In his amnesia, Mr. Mind found all his former activities abhorrent, and dedicated himself to making up for his evil deeds. But this condition couldn't last long, and another blow brought Mr. Mind back to his usual horrible self. By that time, Captain Marvel had wrecked every scheme and wiped out the entire Monster Society of Evil.

In the final chapter, Mr. Mind's last two henchmen quit, one to go back to work in a sideshow, the other to work in an airplane factory. The little worm didn't give up easily. He made one last attempt to electrocute Billy all by himself. He was captured when an exterminator's gas spray drove him out of his hiding place in a radiator at Station WHIZ.



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Mr. Mind was put on trial for his crimes, and, as special prosecutor, Captain Marvel duly charged him with the murder of 186,744 people (actually a modest accomplishment in those days of World War II).

Even Mr. Mind's lawyer turned against him. Deciding that appealing on grounds of a mistrial was useless, Mr. Mind fatalisticly went to the electric chair. His tiny body was stuffed and put on display at a museum. Billy looked at the exhibit grimly. "Well, that's the final and complete end of Mr. Mind! Only a little worm, but he had the whole world worried for two years! There were times when Captain Marvel thought he'd never get him!" Even so, there were some who were sorry to see the little fiend go—the Fawcett crew for example.

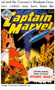
Otto Binder recalled the little monster with the spectacles nostalgically.

"Mr. Mind wasn't a worm, at least not for the first half dozen chapters. The Captain Marvel brain-trust composed of Beck and myself got our heads together to figure out just who or what Mr. Mind should be, after I invented him as a disembodied voice.

"We undoubtedly went through a hundred concepts, until somebody (and, frankly, in those skull sessions, I have no idea who first thought of any particular gimmick) . . . somebody said, 'Why not take the most unusual thing we can think of? Not the traditional human or galactic villain, nor robot, nor this or that of the routine masterminds, but just the goofiest of all things—maybe a worm!'

"I vaguely recall that this was enthusiastically endorsed by us with much laughter and a tongue-in-cheek attitude. We had no idea that thing would become popular!!?? We truly were amazed at the electrifying response—letters pouring in—and believe me, with a readership of over one million as we had in those days, the mail can become pretty imposing. A rousing consensus simply loved Mr. Mind! Why? We never figured it out.

"The flood of letters, as a matter of practicality, set us to dreaming up new and more outre situations between the World's Mightiest Mortal and the Universe's Weakest Creature (which may have been the genetical thought that conjured up a worm).



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"Of course, the sheer poles-apart contrast made for a wealth of ideas (as inspirations always do), so that the serial ran for 25 chapters before we decided, perhaps wisely, that too much of a good thing is bad.

"I won't exactly say tears were in our eyes that day we worked up the final chapter and executed Mr. Mind but, in all honesty, I think we all felt a loss of some kind. You can't write about any character for a length of time—worm or warm-blooded man—without a sense of sadness at 'killing him off.'

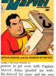
"The only other Captain Marvel serial that approached Mr. Mind—and quite closely, as a matter of fact—was the Tawky Tawny Tiger non-serial succession of sequels. Response was also overwhelming for him. Because he had lent himself more to orthodox concepts, it was Tawny that Beck and I chose as a possible syndicate newspaper strip."

The adventures of Tawky Tawny, the loquacious tiger, began in December 1947, and ran on for 23 rib-tickling tales in *Captain Marvel Adventures* (Binder had scripted two more but they were never published). Mr. Tawny was a full-grown tiger who wore a business suit and acted like any other comic book human being. If anyone ever thought of telling him he'd be more in place in *Funny Animals*, they certainly never mentioned it to him.

Any other super hero strip would have considered the felicitous feline a cat-astrophe, but to Captain Marvel he was just another one of the gang. Though Binder and Beck submitted samples of Mr. Tawny in a strip of his own for newspaper syndication, it was never accepted. In 1943 they had attempted to sell Captain Marvel as a newspaper strip but the impending lawsuit prevented any such agreement.

*Captain Marvel Adventures* 61 featured another serial, only six parts long. It concerned Oggar, the World's Mightiest Immortal, a toga-wearing God exiled from the Home of the Gods by Old Shazam. He had one weakness, and Captain Marvel searched for it for six issues, finally discovering that (as for many men) it was a woman who turned the magic which Oggar had used against her back at him.

Some of the other interesting villains Captain Marvel encountered during his career were: Ibac, a stooge of Mr. Mind in the great serial, who had originally appeared in *Captain Marvel Adventures* 8. He was really Stinky Printwhistle, a minor criminal, who made a deal with the Devil for superhuman powers to get even with Captain Marvel. Satan granted his wish. He derived his name and his own magic word, IBAC, from Ivan the Terrible (giving him the power of terror), Borgia (the family of poisoners who represented cunning), Atilla the Hun (fierceness), and Caligula (cruelty). Ibac was an ugly bare-chested bruiser in black toreador pants. He had superhuman powers, but since no evil could be as strong as good, in the end he was no match for Captain Marvel.


Captain Marvel
Adventures
10¢
CAPTAIN MARVEL and the HORROR IN THE BOX

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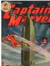
—Mr. Atom, a grim parable in comic form. He took the appearance of a lumbering robot, powered by atomic energy. He was not content to be the slave of man, but wished to be his master. "I was not destined for an inglorious serfdom! I am not weak like ordinary mortals! To rule over men—Yes, that is my destiny!" Captain Marvel succeeded in capturing him and chaining him in the thick lead walls of a prison, but later stories revealed he could not be imprisoned forever.



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—The Red Crusher, a very late development, who was the fanged, yellow-skinned oriental monster to end them all. (In 1952, he would be North Korean. In other times, in other places, the same face would be identified as Japanese, Chinese, and North Vietnamese.)

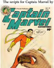
Besides C. C. Beck, a score of artists were responsible for recording the adventures of Captain Marvel. Among them were Pete Costanza, Ed Robbins, Al Fagaly, Alex Koster, Ray Harford, Al McLean, George Tuska, Dave Berg, Marc Swayze, Charles Sultan, Ken Bald, Chic Stone, and Charlie Tomsey. The strips all came from four sources—The Harry "A" Chesler shop, the Jack Binder Studio, the Beck-Costanza shops, and from Fawcett's own staff.

Somewhere along the way, the artists who really knew figure drawing decided Captain Marvel couldn't possibly wear those red tights without some bulge in the area of his groin unless . . .

Well, they liked to sing while they drew and somebody worked out an adaptation of a rowdy song popular in the army at that time. One afternoon, Ralph Daigh was escorting Larraine Day, the pretty Quaker girl of the movies, on a tour of the various magazines. They had just entered the comics editorial room when, from the art department next door, came a chorus of male voices lustily chanting:

"No b-lls, no b-lls, no b-lls at all!
Cap-i-tan Marvel has no b-lls at all!
No b-lls, no b-lls, no b-lls at all!"

The scripts for Captain Marvel by



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Otto Binder, Bill Parker, Rod Reed, Joe Millard, William Woolfolk, Manly Wade Wellman, Ed Herron, John Beardsley, and Wendell Crowley, were often satires or take-offs on the classics of literature. *On Borrowed Time*, *Why the Sea is Salty*, Greek mythology, current science fiction (including Otto Binder's own Adam Link stories), all served to inspire mighty Marvel tales.

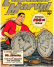
Captain Marvel featured parodies about everything. It is surprising that the strip so seldom used other comic book characters. One however did appear in the same issue that featured the first Mr. Mind chapter. In that story, he met Clubmen and the Bird (a club can also be a bat, remember), Zartan of the Jungle, Hash Bordon of the Planet Mongrel, Flopear, Dash Tracer, Little Woeful Polly, and others. They were all striking against the publisher of their comic books because they wanted a different way of life. But Captain Marvel convinced them not to try to be anything but their own selves. Billy prophetically closed with "See you in the funny papers!"

Captain Marvel voyaged through space to friendly and hostile planets, to the far future (in one story to a distant world where Billy was still a boy but where the abbreviated language had him saying only "Shaz," leaving the futuristic Capmarv without the courage and speed of Achilles and Mercury with amusing results), to other dimensions (including one where he tried to keep a giant from waking from his dream—a dream that was the only existence for the whole world), and, more routinely, to just about every large and middle-sized city in the country, beginning with Minneapolis, going through Denver, Buffalo, Dallas, and a score of others. In each of these stories, leading personalities of the honored city would be drawn into the story. Occasionally an artist would goof, getting the photographs he had to work from mixed. Captain Marvel would be shaking hands with a man with the face of a famous local sportscaster, and saying, "Pleased to meet you, Mr. Mayor".

When the January 1954 issue of *The Marvel Family* was published, its cover was accidentally the most prophetic ever to appear in the comic chronology. It depicted a boy staring in disbelief at the blank silhouettes where the three Marvels should have stood. "Holy Moley!" He exclaimed, "What happened to the Marvel Family?"

"Holy Moley," indeed. The accompanying story, titled *And Then There Were None*, signaled the final chapter in the Marvel saga. Superman's appeal had been argued in court in May, 1951. Using some thunder of his own, attorney Nizer snapped the thread that held the lawsuit. The great stone block fell.

On August 30, 1951, the appeal for a new trial was granted; the official record states:



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"The dismissal of Detective's claim for 'misappropriation and 'unfair competition' was clearly right. There could be no misappropriation of any 'strips', once published, if they were not copyrighted; as we said at the outset, they went at once into the public domain and anyone might copy them. International News Service v. Associated Press, 248 U.S. 215, 39 S. Ct. 68, 63 L.Ed. 211, is authority only for the situation there at bar, as has been over and over decided. The claim for unfair competition is equally baseless. In the first place, Fawcett's magazines bore its name which had no resemblance to Detective's, and there was no reasonable ground for supposing that readers would mistake one for the other. But the misapprehension goes much deeper. The owner's right to protect his name or mark from being copied depends primarily upon the likelihood that those who may wish to deal with him will be misled into dealing with the infringer; and that presupposes, not only that the mark has become associated with the owner as the source of the goods, but that this association is an inducement to deal with the owner. In the case of these silly pictures nobody cares who is the producer—least of all children who are the chief readers—; the 'strips' sell because they amuse and please, and they amuse and please because they are what they are, not because they come from 'Detective.' To allow the first producer of such pictures to prevent others from copying them, save as he can invoke the Copyright Law, would sanction a completely indefensible monopoly."

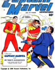
In addition, the court reversed the earlier judgment stating that the copyrights to Superman were not lost because there was an intent to abandon these rights.

"On the new trial the court will have to decide what valid copyrights Republic did infringe, and we shall have findings to guide us. On this record we cannot dispose of the claim. Nor will we pass upon the merits of the crossclaim of Republic against Fawcett upon its agreement to hold Republic harmless for we have no findings.

"Finally, we will not decide whether the district court had a dependent jurisdiction over the crossclaim under the doctrine of Hurn v. Oursler, 289 U.S. 238, 53 S. Ct. 588, 77 L. Ed. 1148, now embodied in the Judiciary Code. That question the briefs did not argue, and indeed did no more than incidentally allude to; it must await development upon the new trial.

"Judgment reversed; and cause remanded for further proceedings consistent with the foregoing opinion."

Several more years would pass before that new trial could be heard in court. The cost of all the legal assistance was astronomical. Fawcett



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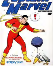
staffers joked about retiring a lawyer to Florida every week. For an entire year at least a dozen of the Fawcett crew spent all their time looking through old comic strips to find instances of super feats long before Superman and Captain Marvel—like those of Popeye (super strength) and Little Nemo (flying). When they were done, they had pasted up an enormous book of comic duplications. The board of directors was beginning to wonder if it was all worth it!

Then, in the fall of 1953, Fawcett made the decision to discontinue their line of comic publications and settle with Superman out of court. Otto Binder, Captain Marvel's chief author revealed the reasons behind the move:

"An order had come from Fawcett's upper offices wisely suggesting that all writers and artists completely avoid looking at DC publications so as not to 'subconsciously' utilize or dress-up a plot or situation or gimmick of theirs, which could be damaging in court.



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"I did not read Superman stories, except at rare times. Each time I did, I felt their approach was not for Captain Marvel, who had developed into a wholly different area of humor, fantasy, and whimsy, you might say—not the dead-serious grimness and plodding consistency of Superman.

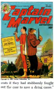
"In my opinion my development of Captain Marvel and his 'family' (I was chief writer and idea man from mid-1941 till the end) was entirely my own, and if anything, it avoided any of the 'tone' of Superman completely. This I can state categorically—not one story idea was ever 'lifted' from Superman.

"A curious thing came out in the pre-settlement era, when we Fawcett people were asked to help compare hundreds of Superman and Captain Marvel stories, ideas, even individual panels: for as many as 'copied' Superman, even more appeared in

Superman as if copied from Captain Marvel. I'm not saying they 'stole' from Captain Marvel; I'm simply bringing out the fact (which I'm sure the Superman lawyers knew) that by sheer coincidence, when you have dozens of writers and artists on either side producing massive material following the same general idea of a 'super character', literally hundreds of panels and sequences would be almost identical!

"The reason Fawcett withdrew from a court hearing and settled the suit has nothing to do with the above 'rebuttal evidence' against imitation, plagiarism, or whatever they called it. It was because dropping sales and profits by 1953 convinced the Fawcett money-counters that the comics had had their heyday and why not quit while ahead?

"The fact that they killed all their comics (the Superman injunction killed only the Marvel series) is proof enough to the fair-minded observer that Fawcett's giving up was not an admission of guilt, just canny business, saving enormous court costs if they had stubbornly fought out the case to save a dying cause."



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Fawcett settled quietly out of court, allegedly paying damages to Superman amounting to $400,000 and agreeing to discontinue any use of the Captain Marvel character.

Beck closed the shops and moved to Florida where he began freelancing work, eventually opening his own studio of art and design. He put together a number of presentations which ranged from strips to single panel cartoons, and offered them to newspaper syndicates with no luck. He tried his hand at writing fiction (in the early 40's, Beck had scripted a single Captain Marvel tale) and submitted four stories to *Astounding Science Fiction*. One story, *Vanishing Point*, was accepted and appeared in the July 1959 issue.

Then in 1966, Will Lieberson's Milson Publications assembled the team of Beck, Binder, Reed and Crowley as the crew for a new line of comics. Suddenly Beck found time had turned back 25 years as he penciled, inked, and even lettered the new strips just as he had done with the first Captain Marvel stories.

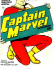
Wendell Crowley described the lead feature like this: "Fatman is a huge, rotund fellow who receives the capability of changing himself into an indestructable flying saucer from a strange, little, green man from another world. From the time he receives his magic powers, he spends most of his time beating up inhuman monsters, fighting crime, and eating." Fatman's one weakness was food and for three issues he'd spout exclamations like "Holy peach pie" and "Holy salad dressing."

Another Milson character, Super Green Beret, also lasted three issues. But just before the books folded, they announced a third companion magazine–Captain Shazam. He was to be a modern day version of the Big Red Cheese, done by the same men who worked on the original. It was a losing venture. The Marvel men split up their partnership for the second and final time.

Lieberson returned to an editorial position at the publishing firm he was with before his Fawcett term. Rod Reed occasionally freelanced writing assignments for his magazines. Crowley became a partner in a lumber firm. Many of the artists like Costanza and Schaffenburger found jobs at National.

Otto Binder took a somewhat different course. He tells it like this:

"Right after Fawcett folded its comic publications, I began writing for Bill Gaines at EC–science-fiction, horror, pirates, even Mad stuff. Dell was buying quite a few two-page text fillers from me also. Of course, I had started working for National in 1947 beginning with Johnny Quick, Aquaman, and the Green Arrow. After the lawsuit, I started turning out Superboy, Lois Lane, Jimmy Olsen, and, ironically enough Superman himself in the late 50's.


NEW AND EXCITING ADVENTURES OF THE WORLD'S MIGHTIEST MORTAL
Captain Marvel
Adventures
10¢

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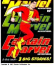
"Way back in the late 40's, I had also begun writing science articles, selling a string of them to *Mechanix Illustrated*. I did several odd pieces for *Yearbooks* (chemistry, astronomy, et al), also for the Children's Editions of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, not to mention a year's contract with NASA for whom I wrote several spread-out booklets on the Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo programs which they sent to high schools free.

"In the late 50's, I turned out a series of non-fiction science books for Golden Press like *Atomic Energy* and *The Planets*, a few for Walker Publications including *Victory In Space* and several others. A number of my old pulp tales found their way into paperback reprints and, of course, Adam Link finally made it to TV.

"In 1960, Bill Woolfolk and I launched *Space World*, a monthly magazine–all factual, no fiction. It gave me the chance to be the research scientist I always hoped to be. We thought that at that time–what with Russian shots to the moon and the excitement of the space race–that the American public would grab it up. It was written in non-technical style. Well, it laid an egg bigger than the asteroid Icarus. By 1964, it was bankrupt. Bill had put in all his money made from a few girly magazines, some $75,000, and I had borrowed on insurance and mortgaged our house (we called it the house that Captain Marvel built–and paid for several times over) to put in $35,000. I was the junior partner. But every month we'd get the bad news about distribution. It ran about 16 or 17 issues before we gave it to Ray Palmer who reprints all NASA articles and doesn't have to write a thing. If it had gone over even moderately, of course, we would have done nicely and even in time more than nicely.



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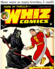
"But we both ended up dead broke, so I began to make a comeback in comics with Mort Weisinger at DC. I started at $13 a page and worked my way up to $16. But there were so many rewrites, I could only get one story done a week. Quite a change from the 'good old days' at Fawcett. In addition, I wrote for Harvey, Milson, and Dell Publications where I created Mighty Samson.



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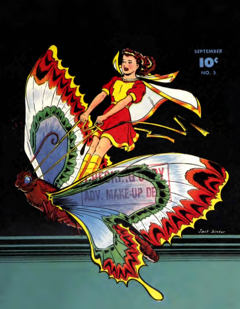
"But it was tough sledding after that and when our daughter, Mary died in 1967, we finally made up our minds to 'start a new life'. When we moved to upstate New York in 1969, I quit DC and comics entirely and went back into the sci-fi paperback field. Curtis Books bought seven of my books in a row, including a few oldies and Belmont issued another half a dozen. I began selling 'gothics' besides a batch of flying saucer books and articles for *Saga Magazine*.

"I averaged 2,000 to 3,000 words a day at 1 cent to 2-1/2 cents a word in S-F. In comics, I'd often write two complete long stories a day at $10 a page. But there are other things–it's great fishing up here and I manage to get out several times a week, after writing chores are done.

"In the early days of comics, we all loved it. We were pioneers. Work was fresh, original. We invented new characters, gimmicks, plots, and action endlessly. Everything was brand new. The sky was the limit!"

The Captain Marvel saga is over–he had reached the limit Binder spoke of in a way that few other comic heroes will ever know. In the final summation of his style, character, and adventures, The Big Red Cheese might best be described as the Archie Andrews of the superhero cult. Though the memory of him fades with each passing generation, his stentorian call to action will be remembered in a million hearts, forever. . .

*SHAZAM!!*


SEPTEMBER
10¢
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ADV. MAKE-UP DE
Jack Binder

A fine example of Jack Binder's style from the cover of Mary Marvel 5.

# LIGHTNING STRIKES TWICE

Who says lightning doesn't strike twice?

In the case of Fawcett Publications, it not only struck twice, but three times—to produce a super trio of Whiz Kids every 40's comic connoisseur knew as the Marvel Family. Fawcett execs had taken a long look at their star's sales figures and asked themselves if there was enough room in the comic universe for more than one Marvel.

Captain Marvel, Jr. suddenly appeared at the striking point of one of ancient Shazam's magical lightning bolts—a teenage version of the Big Red Cheese. The ancient wizard worked his spell again (after resting up for a year), and produced the female member of the titanic trio, Mary Marvel.

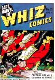
There would be others over the years, but the old man's magic seemed to grow more feeble with each new creation. Nevertheless, three were enough . . . enough for comic readers with any kind of taste, and enough for the publishers to become one of the leaders in the world of comic Americana.

For awhile it seemed as though Fawcett editors and writers were stuck with a string of second-raters populating titles like *Master*, *Nickle*, and *Slam-Bang*—none of whom apparently had enough magic to outclass any of the original Whiz Kids, Captain Marvel and his friends. Fawcett needed more heavy artillery in their flagging titles. The event was overdue. Then, it happened—beginning in the September 1941 issue of Whiz with a tale titled "Captain Marvel's Squadron of Justice."

The story began as three young boys visited Billy Batson at the radio station where he worked. Unusually enough, each of these boys was also named Billy Batson (which after all was not as unusual as Clark Kent).

For the sake of convenience, they decided to call themselves Tall Billy (a Western type), Hill Billy (from the Ozarks), and Fat Billy (a chubby Brooklynite). They had learned about Billy and his magic word—from reading comic books, of course—and had all wondered if the secret word would also work for them. (The old wizard, Shazam, had said nothing about bestowing his magic powers on every kid in the country named William Batson, but few were the kids during the forties who did not try the magic word more than once with fainter encouragement than actually having the same name as Billy).

In the course of the episode, Sivana and his henchmen accidentally kidnapped the other three Billys, then, finally, the right one. Not wishing to let four innocent victims go to waste, the wicked old scientist tied all the boys on a log and fed it into a buzzsaw. The authentic Billy daringly removed his gag by leaning against the rasping blade to cut it away, but the sound of his voice could not carry above the roaring scream of the saw. He gave a wink, a pre-arranged signal to the boys to try their word together. They shouted a terrific "SHAZAM!" Four streaks of lightning produced four red-suited Marvels. "It worked!" the original Captain Marvel said, smashing the buzzsaw with a casual punch.



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"Am I really a Captain Marvel?" said blond Hill Marvel. "No—dere ain't but one Captain Marvel!" said red-haired Fat Marvel. "I guess we're kinda Second Lieutenant Marvels," said black-haired, lanky Tall Marvel reasonably enough. The four Marvel men went flying after Sivana's airplane, crashing through its wings, sending it downward (but of course, not Sivana) to a flaming doom. The magic word made Captain Marvel and his Three Lieutenant Marvels boys once more. They agreed not to tell their miraculous tale, or to ever say the magic word unless all were together again.

The introduction of the Three Lieutenant Marvels (as they were officially termed in later stories) served no commercial purpose at Fawcett. The addition of three grown men with Marvel powers, differing slightly from the Big Red Cheese offered minimum opportunity for exploitation. Yet readers responded to the newcomers. It was as if D'Artagnan had found his Three Musketeers. They appeared in a number of issues of *Whiz* and other titles but never in a strip of their own.

## OR, PLAY IT AGAIN, SHAZAM!

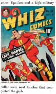
Yet the Three Lieutenant Marvels inspired some thought about expanding the Marvel mystique. Three ditto copies of Captain Marvel were of no value—except for the novelty and only served to water down the original. But how about a boy who said a magic word, changed into a Marvel-powered hero, and still remained a boy?

*Whiz* 25, December 1941, introduced a new character without much fan-fare. The cover only showed Captain Marvel putting his shoulder to the wheel of a giant turbine, bringing it to a halt in a shower of sparks. The inside front cover had a black-and-white ad for a new Marvel character in *Master Comics*, but it was over-shadowed by the color splash page picture of CAPTAIN NAZI. Since both characters are closely linked, let's go back to the beginning.

Nazi had first appeared in a 15-page origin story in the Bulletman strip in *Master Comics* 21, December 1941. The storyline continued in *Whiz* 25 and wound up in *Master* 22, a three part, 48-page battle epic that would emerge as a classic trilogy in the history of comics for a number of reasons.

The first part opens with Hitler introducing his warlords to another innovation comparable to his "famous Blitzkreig, parachute troops, and fast-moving Panzer Divisions." Plush drapes part. Behind them stands a blond crew-cut warrior whose Aryan eyes gleam with cruel passion. His image is reinforced by a scar running down his cheek, a scar inflicted by a dueling saber at Heidelberg.

His outfit is the most resplendent military uniform yet designed for comics. The tight-fitting shirt and breeches were in complimentary hues of green. Boots, gloves, and a belt were a contrasting crimson. An identifying swastika symbolically decorated a black circle across the chest. Epaulets and a high military collar were neat touches that completed the garb.



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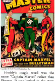
Though no explanation was given, somehow the dynamic Captain Nazi could fly and had super strength. His first mission pitted him against Bulletman, who greeted him with, "Hello, Captain Nutsy!" At the story's conclusion, the Aryan avenger threatened Captain Marvel in *Whiz Comics*.

In those days, when German villains usually came off like demoniac grotesqueries, Captain Nazi could easily have been a hero to many young readers in their naivete. Nazi seldom came off worse than in a tie with the other superbeings he fought, and his ruthlessness had a certain fascination. He only proved that evil can be attractive, and was certainly the most unsuccessful bit of war-time propaganda devised in America.

In the *Whiz* episode, Captain Marvel had finally succeeded in knocking Captain Nazi out of an airplane cockpit into the waters of a bay below where a boy and his grandfather were fishing in a boat. As they helped the uniformed man out of the water into the small boat, Captain Nazi repaid the kindness by trying to kill them both. The old man drowned, but Captain Marvel rescued the lad, taking him to a hospital for treatment. The diagnosis: death before morning.

As Billy Batson, he took the injured boy to the court of last resort—the subway tunnel where the throne of old Shazam was hidden. After lighting the magic urn, the ghostly figure of the old Wizard appeared. Billy begged for help for the dying boy. Shazam responded, "What has already come to pass cannot be changed by any power of mine, but you, as Captain Marvel, can, if you will, pass on to this poor boy some of the mighty powers I once gave you! Billy Batson, speak my name!" With the sounding of his name, the old wizard disappeared and Captain Marvel stood in his place.

The injured boy roused, and murmered "Why it—it's Captain Marvel!" Magic lightning suddenly crashed down and in the injured boy's place stood a healthy, athletic boy of thirteen or fourteen in a costume much like Captain Marvel's own. His basic uniform was blue instead of red, with a red cape replacing the standard white; the gold boots, sash, and trim were the same. "I'm all well again! I'm strong—I—I'm like you!" said the boy incredulously. "That's right! You're Captain Marvel Jr.!" The boy's real name was Freddy Freeman (as told in the following issue) and while he was no blood relative to Billy Batson, he had been clearly made Captain Marvel's adopted son.



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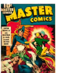
Freddy's magic word was the name "Captain Marvel" rather than Shazam. It was logical in the story sense, but it was also commercial. When readers followed the exploits of Captain Marvel Jr. in *Master Comics* and later in his own magazine, Fawcett editors wanted them to remember that Captain Marvel Senior was still around. It was also decided that the Captain Marvel Jr. stories be told in the smooth illustration style of Mac Raboy, rather than the Beck cartoon form. Not only were they aiming at those who preferred a younger hero, but also those who liked more realistic illustration.



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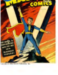
Freddy Freeman found out that when he resumed his normal form, his leg remained crippled from the blow Captain Nazi had dealt him. So, as a crippled newspaper seller, Freddy lived his days until called into action as Captain Marvel Jr. Readers must have wondered why Billy and certainly Freddy ever bothered to change back to their weaker, less colorful alter egos. Of course, it was part of the price they agreed to pay for having their superhuman powers even temporarily. Besides, it boosted comic sales through greater reader identification.

As the strip became more successful, editor Wendell Crowley asked for a tighter framework around which to build the stories. Otto Binder made the following presentation:

"Ideas On New Set-up For Junior!

"The purpose is to isolate Junior and Freddy Freeman in space. To give them a definite locale for the stories and to surround them with people who can develop into seemingly real characters. The stories will not all necessarily have to take place in this background. The fantasies and the adventures in far corners of the world will still have their place, but Junior will always return to one spot when he's done. He will have a specific home and a definite place to sell his papers.



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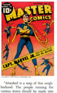
"Up to now Freddy Freeman has been wherever the writer's convenience has needed him. This didn't make for too much clarity in his existence. To start him off on his new life, he gets an offer to run a newstand in a small suburban neighborhood in the same city he has been rattling around in aimlessly up to this time.

"Jr. moves into the neighborhood. He will have an established newsstand that will always remain in one place, but he will additionally be given a newspaper route that will take him to different parts of the district if necessary. He operates his route in the morning, before breakfast perhaps delivering the morning paper, *The Daily Gazette*. In the afternoon, he sells the evening paper, *The Evening Star*, at his newsstand.



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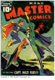
"Attached is a map of this neighborhood. The people running the various stores should be made into distinct characters that will reappear in the stories. The reader will get to know them. Then when they are involved in action with Freddy Freeman and Junior, the reader will feel more deeply for them than he would for some character just dragged in for the sake of the story.

"The first character Freddy Freeman meets would probably be Mrs. Wagner, his landlady. He gets a room in her house and maybe takes some of his meals there. Transient characters stopping off at the rooming house could lead to more plots. Mrs. Wagner is a big, jovial, hardworking woman, good cook, friendly and motherly to Freddy. Her house and Freddy Freeman's room there should be definitely established so that the reader will become familiar with it. Something similar to the way the reader recognizes Billy Batson's Radio Station WHIZ.

"Freddy Freeman's newsstand will be on the corner of Oak and Main, just in front of the bank. Bank is run by Mr. Davenport, respectable, sedate. His other employees can be worked out as they are needed. Such as tellers, secretaries, etc.

"Beyond the alley, behind the bank, is a combination fire department and police station. Fire engines are in one half and the police desk in the other. Fire head is Chief Bond, blustery, red-faced battler. He has some paid helpers and a dog that could take a fancy to Freddy Freeman. Police Captain Cornell is good-natured, helpful to kids, easygoing. Sergeant Stern is tougher, rough on crooks. Patrolman Potter is smiling, friend to all law abiders, neighborly, but courageous in the face of danger.

"Across the street is a Chinese laundry run by Cholly, small, round, humorous. Next, a corner drug store, gathering place, gossip center. Sells most anything. Pop is the proprietor.



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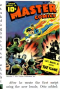
Next door is the movie house operated by suave, well-dressed, highly polished Mr. Peenely. Across the street is a jewelry store in case it has to be robbed. Next door, on the corner, is an office building. This can house all the characters needing offices that continually appear in the strip. Next to that is a barber shop.

"But all the various characters that are needed for the shops, etc. can be created as they are needed. Main thing now is to draw the set-up so the reader will get a good picture of it.

"Objections might possibly be made that is seems too complicated." We'll be characterizing people for months and months if this is all done at once. The neighborhood can be set up in one big picture and background shots repeated to gain familiarity. Otherwise the stories will probably be much the same with efforts made each time to use continuing characters where they fit in naturally.

"Another thing that has not been mentioned is Freddy Freeman's school. Should he go to school? Or would it be best to sluff over this point?"



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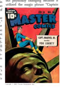
After he wrote the first script using the new locale, Otto added: "One thing is more-or-less ignored in the story—the fact that upright people are the ones who patronize bookie joints. I thought it best not to bring in this angle at all, so I confined it to just thugs who patronize the place.

"I can picture your Master List by 1948, filling 14 volumes, with three secretaries handling it, and new writers for Captain Marvel Jr. taking a one-year research course before turning out their first scripts! Actually, though, I think it will settle itself down to a certain set of scenes and characters, and it will add realism."

Captain Marvel Jr. went on for years, with his earliest and some of his best stories drawn by Mac Raboy in *Master* which began with the Bulletman crossover in *Master* 22. He fought Captain Nazi endlessly and in addition, kept the heat on Mr. Macabre, Dr. Eternity, The Pied Piper, The Acrobat, Sabbac, Captain Nippon, and others.

The amusing sidelight on the character was that Captain Marvel Jr. could not speak his own name without physically changing because it utilized the magic phrase "Captain



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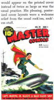
Marvel." (Peddling papers became quite rough when a newsboy couldn't even yell out a headline—one that he had made himself.) He did change personalities inadvertently a few times, but writers still slipped up on the point occasionally.

Captain Marvel Jr. was the brainchild of Fawcett editor Ed Herron who had worked on other strips with kid counterparts, most notably the first issues of Captain America and Bucky. Herron's idea for an assimilated version of the mighty Marvel was brilliant. Fortunately, so was the artist who got the assignment—Mac Raboy.

Raboy's style was as important to Captain Marvel Jr. as Kirby's was to Captain America or Beck's was to the Big Red Cheese himself. For sheer polish and grace, Raboy's figures compare admirably with the source that inspired them: Alex Raymond's Flash Gordon. In addition, Raboy was an expert technician with a pen and brush, often rendering his cover art almost the same size as it would appear on the printed cover instead of twice as large as was the usual practice. His pleasing, posterized cover layouts were a welcome relief from the usual rock'em, sock'em stuff.



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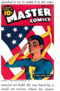
Emanuel Raboy was born in New York City on April 9, 1914, the son of Sarah and Isaac Raboy. He grew up as the only child in the family, poor, but comfortably pampered. Young "Mac" soon supplemented any inadequacies in his life by involving himself in the intricacies of drawing pictures. After leaving P. S. 44, he attended De Witt Clinton High School, an institution that passed a great number of soon-to-be comic artists through its doors. Raboy, although quiet and shy, met several of them, causing his interest in art to develop to the point where he joined a WPA drawing class to expand his knowledge.

Though he could hardly be called articulate with words, Raboy realized early that his drawings could speak for him. From then on, Raboy expressed himself through his art—it would eventually bring him recognition, success, and financial reward.

After graduation, Raboy became a WPA artist at which time a number of his wood engravings were exhibited throughout the country. Several are now in the permanent collection of the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art. Shortly afterward, he decided to try to make it in the commercial art field. He was hired by a small art service where his chores consisted of cleaning up layouts, paste-ups, lettering—in his own words, "All kinds of the usual dirty work!"



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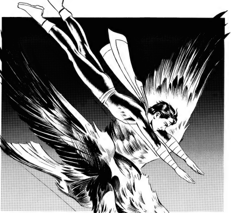
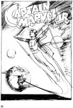
Then, in 1940, Raboy noticed a newspaper ad which promised good steady jobs to competent artists. He applied for the position and suddenly found himself thrust headlong into the comic business as a staffer in the Harry "A" Chesler shop. Raboy couldn't have been more pleased. He was fascinated by the comics ability to suspend reality, to create a world of their own.

He had chosen Alex Raymond as his idol years earlier when the Flash Gordon Sunday strip had begun in the mid-30's. Raboy compiled a big volume of Raymond material to study and use during his career. He would soon become the foremost exponent of the Raymond school of art in the comics, his figures imbued with the flawless beauty and mannered elegance of the master. (Raboy's Captain Nazi was inspired by Raymond's militaristic Mongolians and was most probably modeled after the crew-cut Prince Barin.) There was, however, one aspect of Raymond's work Raboy found impossible to emulate—speed!

Where Raymond drew quickly and effortlessly, often with the aid of models, Raboy labored at length over his assignments. He soon discovered that the fastest and most

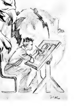




Above: A classic example of Mac Raboy's simple design approach to *Captain Marvel Jr.* covers. The original was drawn and rendered almost the same size as the printed cover.

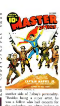
Left: A rough pencil sketch submitted by Raboy for editorial approval. A finished cover illustration was then developed from it.

Right: A self-portrait of Raboy drawn during his Green Lama period.

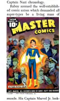


dependable artists were looked upon with the most favor by comic editors whose primary concern was meeting deadlines, not producing artistic masterpieces.

During his several years at the Chesler studio, Raboy's work graced a host of Fawcett characters which included Ibis, Mr. Scarlet, Zoro, Master Mind, and his most important strip up to that point, Bulletman. Editor Herron admired Raboy's clean, lithe figures and tight, realistic rendering, and requested he be assigned to Fawcett's newest Whiz Kid, a character which was really a continuation of the Bulletman/Captain Nazi chronology.



Raboy scorned the well-established comic axiom which demanded all super-types be a living mass of muscle. His Captain Marvel Jr. looked like nothing more than a 14-year old, 98-pound weakling. Arms and legs were straight as sticks, chest development was non-existent. Could it work?



You better believe it!

The notion of a super-powered boy who physically remained a boy was immediately accepted by comic readers (possibly as a welcome change from the usual muscle-bound manhunters). Raboy envisioned Jr. as idealistically handsome, almost pretty, with a sparkling, boyish smile. His hair was a tousled shag of blue-black curls.

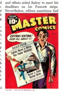
The youthful vitality of the character came through like few others ever would primarily due to Raboy's light, sensitive treatment. Like Raymond, he was never prone to utilize heavy blacks, consequently, the strip had a vivacity and spirit totally appropriate for the comic's first super-successful superboy. Of special note, are Raboy's flying figures which were unusually buoyant and light. His rendering style combined with his special sense of anatomical balance and poise created the ultimate floating and flying sequences.

Fawcett editor Rod Reed recalled another side of Raboy's personality. "Besides being a super artist, he was a fellow who had concern for the underdog. An editor looking at some panels Mac had just completed for Captain Marvel Jr. noticed a little colored boy among youngsters attending a birthday party for Freddie Freeman.

"The editor said, 'You'll have to take him out of there. I'm not prejudiced but we've got circulation in the South. Down there they won't appreciate a Negro at a white birthday party.' The editor thought Raboy had agreed to the deletion but when the issue was printed, there was the little colored chap among all those young honkies enjoying the party just as if he were created equal.

"Reaction, if any, in the South was so slight it was forgotten. And Mac may have been the very first to strike a subtle blow for civil rights in the Hero World."

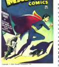
Raboy required a number of assistants to help him produce a reasonable quota of comic book work because of his tedious and languid pace. Vince Alascia, Gene McDonald, Red Moeller, Emil Gershwin and others aided Raboy to meet his deadlines on his Fawcett strips. Nevertheless, editors sometimes had to shoot photostats of published Captain Marvel Jr. figures and paste them into panels in order to finish incomplete jobs turned in after the deadline.



Though his popularity and position were quite secure at Fawcett, Raboy continually worried about getting more comic assignments. Editors would go through the same nervous routine everytime he turned in a job: Is another script ready? When could it be picked up? Was it for certain?

Raboy's very poor early family life had manifested itself as a great insecurity as he matured. In 1935, he had married Lula Morris and had two children of his own, all which understandably put even more pressure on his high-strung, sensitive nature. It all showed in Raboy's appearance and mannerisms. He was considered a sloppy dresser by his associates, and frequently developed several day's growth of beard before shaving. A habitual chain smoker, Raboy always drew while a cigarette dangled from his mouth.

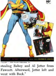
His insecurity developed to the point where any comment made about his work would be taken as criticism. During one editorial session, Will Lieberson called Raboy's attention to the fact that he had depicted five heads in a row during a particular sequence, a definite *faux pas* in comic storytelling. He was so disturbed by the comment that Raboy immediately tore the 10-page story to shreads.



"Mac Raboy was one of the greats of all time," Wendell Crowley recalled. "But he needed direction. He did his best work when he sat at the elbow of Ed Herron.

"Gene McDonald used to help Raboy on Captain Marvel Jr. and got to imitate Mac's inking style about as well as anyone. Red Moeller was another of Raboy's assistants. He and Gene worked more or less together. But Mac's real helper was Rubin Zuboffsky, who later Americanized his name to Ruby Zuboff. His background work will never be forgotten. He was the only man who ever had backgrounds swiped by other artists in the field.

"Ken Crossen used to be an editor at Fawcett. He was an old pulp writer, over a million words a year. He created the Green Lama, owned it, and put it out in his own pulp and was therefore eligible under the wartime rules to get a paper quota when newsprint was scarce. He took that quota and put out his own comics, stealing Raboy and Al Jetter from Fawcett. Afterward, Jetter left and went with Beck."



In 1944, Raboy joined publisher and editor Crossen at Spark Publications and produced *The Green Lama* comic until 1946. Besides his comic work, he accepted commercial advertising jobs. As always, his impeccable style concealed any rough edges that may have existed in the man. Then, in the spring of 1948, he signed with King Features to take over the Flash Gordon Sunday page, the dream of a lifetime. He continued (like Alex Raymond on Rip Kirby) on the strip until his death in December 1967. Of his 25 years in the business, the history of comics must record Raboy's superb Captain Marvel, Jr. as his paramount contribution to the field.

Other artists who helped turn Fawcett's little boy blue into a red letter success included Kurt Schaffenberger, John Belfi, Charles Nicholas, and Al Carreno. Bud Thompson worked on the strip as much as any staffer.

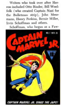
"Bud Thompson used to work on the Fawcett humor books in the early 30's," Wendell Crowley revealed. He went to Hollywood to do a syndicated cartoon panel on the movies and was brought back to do Captain Marvel Jr. when Raboy departed to go with Crossen and the short-lived Green Lama. Afterward, Bud became an instructor at the Famous Artists School in Westport, Connecticut. Nick Zuraw assisted Thompson on Captain Marvel Jr., but never did any of his own work directly for Fawcett. He was an ex-baseball pitcher who was a better oil painter and opera lover than a comics artist. Joe Certa came to Fawcett as an assistant for Bud Thompson. He developed rapidly and soon was able to do stories on his own. Charlie Tomsey and August Froelich also assisted on Captain Marvel Jr."

Thompson's most notable art, however, appeared in the margins of his comic pages, not within the panels themselves. Thompson had the habit of filling the borders with quick sketches of girls—all kinds of girls from petite pin-ups to Amazon cheesecake. He even created his own Marvel character, Aunt Fanny Marvel, a ravishing, long-haired brunette who wore no costume other than an off-the-shoulder cloak and the swashbuckler boots.

What a circulation builder she would have been!!!

Writers who took over after Herron included Otto Binder, Bill Woolfolk (who created Captain Nazi for the Bulletman strip), John Messmann, Henry Perkins, Bernie Miller, Irvin Schoffman and others.

Schoffman, who began as a Fawcett writer, eventually formed his own shop. Primarily he packaged books for small publishers who didn't want the expense of keeping editorial staffs of their own. Yet Schoffman had no staff either; he farmed out his assignments to freelancers. Will Lieberson began using the Schoffman shop in the mid-40's when comics were at their peak of production. In addition to many filler strips, Schoffman produced several western books like Lash Larue and Bob Steele.


NO. 1 NOV. 18
CAPTAIN MARVEL JR.
10¢
CAPTAIN MARVEL JR. SINKS THE JAPS!

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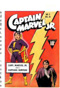
Captain Marvel Jr. bounced Bulletman off the cover spot in *Master Comics* beginning with issues 23 and continued until issue 133, December 1953. In addition he starred in 119 editions of his own book, each with 3 or 4 individual stories. Like all the other Fawcett leaders, he made appearances in a host of anthologies, one-shots, and special editions.


CAPTAIN MARVEL JR.
10¢
CAPT. MARVEL JR. MEETS CAPTAIN NIPPON

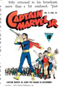
Copyright © 1942 Fawcett Publications, Inc.

After Captain Marvel Jr., the Fawcett mill seemed to be running wild, creating an assortment of new Marvels. Only a year after introducing Captain Marvel Jr., the December 1942 issue of *Captain Marvel Adventures* introduced still another Whiz Kid.

The tale opened as the Mental Marvel Quiz Kids, Percy Pill, Mary Bromfield, and Freddy Freeman, entered the studios of Station WHIZ. During the broadcast, moderator Billy Batson received an urgent message from a dying woman. She told him she had been a nurse when Billy and his twin sister were born and that his sister had been substituted for a rich woman's child that had died.

She had done it so at least this one orphan would have a home. "Who raised my twin Sister? Where is she now? How will I know her?" Billy asked. "You'll know her by this broken locket! She wears the other half! She was raised by a wealthy lady named . . . Ahhhhhh!" The old nurse was dead.

Billy returned to his broadcast, more than a bit confused. "Just think—I'm a twin sister to—No! I mean my twin brother—No! I mean I'm twins and—Oh Golly!"



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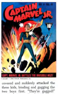
After the show, Billy said goodbye to Mary Bromfield. As her limousine pulled away, Billy realized that it was Mary who wore the other half of the locket he held. He told Freddy and they changed to the mighty Marvels, finding her just as she was being kidnapped. They made short work of the thugs, then showed her the family secret as they changed back to Billy and Freddy.

"Billy—I'm your twin sister—so maybe if I said the magic word, I'd change into something too," Mary mused. Billy displayed his male chauvinism. "Naw! Old Shaz . . .er, you know who . . . wouldn't give his powers to a girl!"

Meanwhile, the crooks had recovered and suddenly attacked the three kids, binding and gagging the two boys first. "They're gagged!" Mary gasped. "Billy can't say SHAZAM!" Sure enough. Mary said the mystic word for the first time in her life and magic lightning crashed down. "It happened! I changed! I feel strong—powerful—My! What a lovely costume too!" A hoodlum crashed a chair over her head. "And a cape just like Captain Marvel's!" They were officially a trio.


CAPTAIN MARVEL JR.
10¢
CAPT. MARVEL JR. BATTLES THE INVISIBLE NAZI!

Copyright © 1942 Fawcett Publications, Inc.

The cover of the issue had revealed her first in a full color painting with Captain Marvel and Captain Marvel Jr. They stood in a spotlight with MARY MARVEL between them in a red and yellow costume that duplicated her big brother's except for short sleeves and a miniskirt. She was, of course, still a girl. (Wonder if the editors ever toyed with the thought of making her a big, busty amazon?)

She finished off the would-be kidnappers in lady-like fashion and freed the two boys. Together they flew off to see the old Wizard who revealed a revised chart for her powers, all of which came from a different source than her brother's.

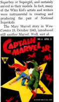
Selena, Goddess of the Moon
—Grace
Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons
—Strength
Ariadne, Spirit of Skill—Skill
Zephyrus, Spirit of the West Wind
—Fleetness
Aurora, Goddess of the Dawn
—Beauty
Minerva, Goddess of Wisdom
—Wisdom

With that, Captain Marvel sent her off with brotherly good wishes to appear in *Wow Comics*, beginning with issue 9, November 1942.

Mary Marvel seemed like a good idea, giving the girl readers a character with which to identify. But girl readers in the comics field have generally been interested in books featuring romance stories. Yet there was never a hint of romance in the Mary Marvel stories, and writers seemed to think, totally without justification, that girl readers only wanted stories a bit more childish than those for boys.

Though they were born from a singular concept, Captain Marvel and his family each had separate and distinct personalities, far greater than the difference between Superman and his two youthful versions. In addition, Mary Marvel and Captain Marvel Jr. existed years before Superboy or Supergirl, and certainly served as their models. In fact, many of the Whiz Kid's artists and writers were instrumental in creating and producing the pair of National Superkids.

The Mary Marvel story in *Wow Comics* 18, October 1943, introduced still another Marvel. Well, sort of.


NO. 6 APRIL 21
CAPTAIN MARVEL JR.
10¢
CAPT. MARVEL JR. AND THE ADVENTURE OF SABBAC

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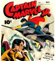
UNCLE MARVEL was a fake Marvel. He found Mary's lost diary (her name was changed from Bromfield to Batson) which recounted her adventures as Mary Marvel, and tried rigging a complicated swindle. The character was obviously based on that of W. C. Fields, in appearance and actions, but he was much mellower than Fields ever was, because he did like children—at least he liked Mary.

First, Uncle Dudley Batson (as he called himself) showed up in a business suit and claimed to be Mary's uncle. If he were really her uncle, he would have inherited the family trait and be able to change with Mary as they said "Shazam" together. It was tried, and lo, there was Uncle Marvel in the familiar red suit. Mary suggested they fly around a bit for some fresh air, and Uncle Marvel proposed they hold hands in flight. In the air, he admitted he could not keep up with Mary unless she helped him along—old age, you know. (Or as it was known to the Marvels—Shazambago!)

Actually, he could not fly at all without help. His miraculous change was achieved under the cover of the magic lightning Mary alone called down; he had a suit of breakaway clothes which could be wisked off by the pull of a zipper. The red Marvel uniform was underneath. Uncle's original scheme was to start a racket called Shazam, Inc. in which he would sell the services of Mary and the other Marvels to those in need.

"Tut tut, my little Apple Blossom! We must not let Shazam, Inc. flounder financially," Uncle Marvel said to Mary. "Good heavens," she thought. "He just said Shazam aloud—and didn't change! He's a fraud! He's not my uncle at all!"

But, at this point, Uncle Marvel proved his mettle by risking his non-invulnerable skin to push a child in the street out of the way of a truck, so Mary decided to humor him in his deception. Under her influence, he chose to make Shazam, Inc. a non-profit organization. Uncle Marvel was around for a long time, off and on, but only as a supporting character.



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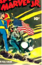
Mary Marvel appeared in *Wow* for 58 issues and in her own title from December 1945 to 1948, a total of 27 additional issues. She continued as part of another Fawcett magazine which teamed all three of them.

The first issue of *The Marvel Family* presented Captain Marvel, Captain Marvel Jr., Mary Marvel, even Uncle Marvel and—what another?—yes, another Marvel for at least one issue.

In a great first issue that briefly recapped the origins of all three of the major Marvels, we learned of the existence of Black Adam, who wore a Marvel uniform—black instead of red, with gold trim and no cape. In ancient Egypt, the old wizard, Shazam, had first granted miraculous powers to a mortal with the unlikely name of Teth-Adam.

He had only to say the enchanted word to become Mighty Adam. Immediately, he saw the advantages in being superhuman. He killed the reigning pharoah and took over the throne. Old Shazam appeared and re-christened the renegade "Black Adam" and banished him to the farthest star in the universe. That's a long way off, but an immortal man flying at a magical speed faster than light can eventually return to earth. Black Adam did just that.



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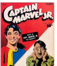
The three mighty Marvels tried slugging it out with him, but he was equally as powerful. Uncle Marvel appeared to try to make peace. "After all, he got his powers from old Mhazam! I mean—Hamshaz! No, I mean Shamhaz—er—uh—!"

Black Adam sneered. "You sputtering old fool! You mean Shazam!" In a crash of thunder, Black Adam returned to his mortal form, and Captain Marvel slugged him cold before he could repeat the magic changeword. Then, five thousand years of age caught up with Adam. He crumbled to dust.

The Three Lieutenant Marvels briefly joined the titanic trio in the second *Marvel Family Comics*, and in issue 28, October 1948, there appeared in an individual Mary Marvel story still another Marvel in a rare cross-over to the "real" world of the human Marvel Family.

He was HOPPY—THE MARVEL BUNNY, who started in Fawcett's Disney competitor, *Funny Animals* 1. His origin? Hoppy was reading a Captain Marvel comic book and wondered if the magic word would work for him. It did, just like Shazam! He became Captain Marvel Bunny, the World's Mightiest Bunny, who was eventually awarded his own title. The stories were aimed at pre-school children who must have had the stories read to them.


CAPTAIN MARVEL JR.
10¢
WHY IS CAPT. MARVEL JR. SO HAPPY?
AND WHY IS HITLER SO MISERABLE?
TURN TO PAGE 4 FOR THE ANSWER!

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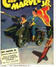
They were charmingly innocent and harmless. In the Mary Marvel cross-over, she had gone to the planetoid Vesta to break up a war between the Cat People and the Dog People. Billy Batson was watching the events through a telescope, and deciding his sister needed help, he went to Animalville to ask Hoppy to change into Captain Marvel Bunny and go to her aid. The World's Mightiest Bunny was glad to oblige. "Mary Marvel? Sure I'll be glad to help! I'll yell the magic word—SHAZAM!" Marvel Bunny knocked some sense back into the other animal people on Vesta, and returned to Animalville. His appearance with the human Marvel Family may have been a bit much to take for readers above the age of five.

Hoppy was the creation of Chad Grothkopf, one of the comic's finest funny animal artists. Chad (he signed his work with his first name) had his own comic shop and produced animated strips for dozens of publishers. His lively thick-and-thin brush line made any character he illustrated a special delight. He went on to become a prominent TV artist and a member of the Famous Artists School staff. Bill Brady also did many funny animal comics for Fawcett.

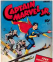

CAPTAIN MARVEL JR.
10¢
CAPT. MARVEL JR.
FULL-LENGTH PUNCH-PACKED STORIES
IN FULL COLOR!

Copyright © 19[illegible] Fawcett Publications, Inc.

Despite all the other Marvel Family members created (including Mary's girl friend FRECKLES MARVEL and a one-shot BABY MARVEL), the original Captain Marvel still got the bulk of the readership.

The triplication of the Marvel magic appropriately multiplied the Fawcett coffers. Much of the Marvel Family success is, of course, attributed to the writing talent of Otto Binder. And much of Otto's success must be attributed to his brother, Jack. Together the Binders are responsible for an enormous segment of, not only the Fawcett books, but the output of the comic industry as a whole.

Though Jack Binder was a comic artist in his own right, in retrospect his primary contribution lies in his organization and systemized production of material to be published. While production shops had existed in the late 30's, it was Binder who, in the early 1940's, formulized the mass output technique which made his outfit one of the biggest and most patronized of them all.


CAPTAIN MARVEL JR.
10¢
FOUR POWER-PACKED CAPTAIN MARVEL JR. ADVENTURE STORIES!

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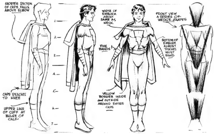
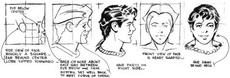
Jack Binder was born on August 11, 1902 in Austria-Hungary, and emigrated to America with his family in 1910. His first contact with drawing had come from his uncle, a school teacher who was sharing his home in Budapest with the Binders. As early as age four, young Jack's attempts at art were approved and appreciated.

In America, the family moved first to Bessemer, Michigan, than to Bandolph, Nebraska where Jack became

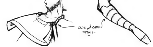
# CAPTAIN MARVEL JR.

SHORT-WAISTED, LONG-LEGGED FIGURE. ABOUT 7½ HEADS HIGH — WITH CROTCH THE CENTER POINT —

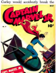

SHORTER SECTION OF CAPE FALLS ABOVE ELBOW
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
CAPE REACHES TO KNEE
UPPER LINE OF CUFF AT BULGE OF CALF
WIDTH OF EMBLEM ABOUT SAME AS NECK
FIVE BANDS
YELLOW BORDER INSIDE and OUTSIDE AROUND ENTIRE CAPE
BOTTOM OF EMBLEM ALMOST TOUCHES WAIST BAND
FRONT VIEW A SERIES OF WEDGE SHAPES


EYE BELOW CENTER
SIDE VIEW OF FACE ROUGHLY A SQUARE — EAR BEHIND CENTER LOBE TIPPED FORWARD —
BASE OF NOSE ABOUT HALF WAY BETWEEN EYE BROW and CHIN
NOSTRIL SET WELL BACK TO MEET CURVE OF CHEEK
HAIR PARTS ON RIGHT SIDE.
FRONT VIEW OF FACE IS HEART SHAPED —
HAIR SHOWS BEHIND NECK

An unpublished model sheet drawn by Raboy to be used as a guide for other artists working on the character.


CAPE and CUFF DETAIL

assistant in his father's blacksmith shop. Because the heat often exceeded 120 degrees, working from midnight to dawn sometimes became a necessity. Earl and his brother, Michael "Curley" Binder frequently pitched in to help whenever they could. The three brothers could be found swinging their hammers together in tempo amid a shower of sparks while forging horseshoes. Sometimes their teamwork didn't quite work out, especially when Curley would accidently break the rhythm and cause a tangle of hammers on the anvil.


CAPTAIN MARVEL JR.
10¢
CAPT. MARVEL JR.
AMERICAN BLOCK-BUSTER

Copyright © 1946 Fawcett Publications, Inc.

Jack decided to try his style at boxing for awhile, sometimes in as many as three bouts a week. However, a chance engagement with a tough fighter called the "Omaha Newsboy" made up his mind to throw in the towel on that idea. It would have been his first professional fight.

Drawing still occupied much of his time. As a young boy, Jack sketched on brown butcher paper. When his mother came home and unwrapped meat, Jack would carefully wash the blood off the paper and iron it flat. In the blacksmith shop, he would practice drawing horses on the wooden walls with charcoal sticks.

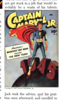
In his late teens, Jack decided that he wasn't cut out for small town life. With his brother Earl and $600, he left home for Chicago. Upon arrival, they immediately rented a plush suite on Washington Boulevard and set out to find their fortune in the big city. Instead, they lost all their money gambling with a couple of hustlers. Too embarrassed to write home for help, they decided to do the best they could on their own.

Food was the immediate problem. They solved it temporarily by scrounging leftovers from picnic baskets in Lincoln Park. Things got worse when they lost their room, and the pair began to spend their nights sleeping on the cold brass railings on a building close to the park. Neither of them could find a job. Maybe small towns weren't so bad after all?

Then one afternoon, as he was dozing against a tree, a breeze blew a piece of newspaper onto Jack. Forcing an eyelid open, he discovered a classified ad plastering itself to the side of his nose: "Wanted —plate press printing apprentice—apply William Friend Company."

In no time, he was on his feet, hustling down to the printers. The fact that he'd eaten only scraps for the past five days made him move even faster. He wouldn't take no for an answer—and landed the job. Within a week, Earl began working there too. As he learned the procedures of printing and plate-making, Jack began to experiment on his own by drawing on copper plates, making etchings, and running them off on the press during his lunch hour.

His associates began to take notice and before long the head engraver requested he take over the engraving department. But his boss intervened, told him to go to school and not get stuck in a job that would inevitably be a waste of his talents.


CAPTAIN MARVEL JR.
10¢
America's Mightiest Boy Hero Salutes The New Year!
1945

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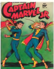
Jack took the advice, quit his position soon afterward, and enrolled in a school—The Chicago Art Institute, the same building whose doorways he had slept in at night, just a few months earlier.

For the next two and a half years, Binder studied fine arts at the school, improving and polishing his knowledge of composition, color, anatomy, and rendering techniques. In 1925, he studied with J. Allen St. John, the most famous of the Edgar Rice Burroughs illustrators who was working on the Tarzan paintings at the time.

Binder recalled St. John's most notable feature: his huge feet and the trouble he had with corns and bunions. Due to this problem, St.


CAPTAIN MARVEL JR.
10¢
AMAZED? ASTONISHED?

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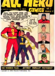
John wore even larger, "lumpy-looking" shoes and the resulting shuffling walk prompted art students to nickname the artist "Suitcase Simpson." Because of a comment about not wanting to "become a little St. John," the headstrong Binder was dismissed from the class.

In 1926, Binder decided to attempt to cash in on his artistic ability with an interesting commercial experiment. He teamed up with a local printer for the purpose of producing Christmas cards for retail sales. Jack supplied the etchings; his partner took care of the printing. In addition, Binder employed several of his fellow art students to hand color the cards for a half cent each per color.

The operation was a success until a competitor who was more mechanized was able to produce a similar product much cheaper. He outsold them by 50% and forced the Binder Christmas Card Company to close shop. The Binder family, who had since moved to Chicago, paid any outstanding bills and dissolved the partnership. The experiment would prove to be one of the most important events in Binder's life up to that point. Although he didn't realize it at the time, he had conceived the assembly line system for producing art work, a concept almost identical to the comic shop technique he would utilize fifteen years later.


ALL HERO COMICS
VOL. 1
MARCH 17
ONE HUNDRED PAGES ... ACTION! THRILLS! PICTURES!

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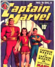
During the following year, Binder got married and for the next seven years, worked for his father-in-law as a milk delivery route man. Meanwhile, Earl and Otto began their writing careers in the science fiction field, culminating in Otto's exodus to New York City in 1934. That same year, Jack Binder decided to join him and take his chances on locating a new source of income.

He had already done some illustrations for *Weird Tales*, collaborating with Earl and Otto on stories they had written. That opened the door for more work at Street & Smith and other pulp factories. He also painted, acted as an art consultant and took on any kind of job that meant an extra buck in his pocket at the end of the week.


NO. 18 DEC. 11
Captain Marvel
10¢
CAPTAIN MARVEL and CAPTAIN MARVEL JR. PROUDLY PRESENT MARY MARVEL

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Through Otto, he had met writers such as Steve Fisher, Henry Kuttner, and Frank Gruber. Knowing that Jack was looking for work, Gruber, who was scripting western tales for Harry "A" Chesler's publications (he used the extra money for track betting without his wife knowing), suggested comic book work.

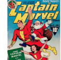
Jack never even heard of comics (they had only been born a few years earlier). Nevertheless, not having any other prospects at the moment, he decided to tag along as Gruber delivered a script (at $1.50 a page). "He introduced me to Chesler," Binder recalled, "and after we talked for awhile about art, he offered me a job. But, frankly, I didn't like the looks of the shop and turned him down. About a year later, I went back to Chesler's shop. After an hour's discussion Harry said, 'I don't want to use you as a staff artist. I want you to take charge, to take over the staff!' I stayed for three years." It was early 1937.

As the shop foreman, Binder directed a staff which included Charlie

Biro, Jack Cole, Lou Fine, Gill Fox, Fred Guardineer, Paul Gustavson, Winsor McCay, Jr., Mort Meskin, Mac Raboy, Don Rico, Charlie Sultan, and George Tuska. Sometimes, twenty or more artists, inkers, writers, and letters were assembled to produce a volume of comic pages for nineteen different publishing companies including Centaur, Detective Comics (National), Fawcett, MLJ, Quality, and Timely.

Binder himself frequently took to the drawing board to produce stories like the first Daredevil tale in *Silver Streak Comics* or covers on books like *Doc Savage* or *Top Notch*. After a year of resisting, he finally persuaded his brother Otto to join him in the comic world.

Candidly Jack explained why comics swept the kid population (and half the grown-ups) off their feet: "Comics told a story! That was the big thing. And they told the story in dramatic form with terrific impact.



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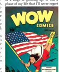
Action was the keynote. Kids who always wanted heroes, now had super-heroes! How could their appeal fail? That, along with the development of new drawing skills and techniques, plus vivid color, did the trick. It was plain magic on paper that put a spell on 50 million kids or more. If any artist of that time (the golden era) didn't get a real bang out of what was really creative work, exploring a whole new field of human expression, then that artist didn't last long. I believe the 'pioneering' we did at Harry Chesler's shop—in basic layouts, color, page patterns etc.—paved the way for the big splash that Superman made not long after. It was like having the stage all set for the dramatic entrance of the blue-suited big one, which launched the real comics explosion.

"Anyway, for my part I liked doing the comics (and don't forget I had fine arts training) and believed they were good for kids. All this later psycho jargon about kids being turned into crooks and bums came from morons with degrees. Every kid likes blood and thunder as a stage of growing up. It was a phase of my life that I'll never regret in the slightest. And I think the comic books, in time, will get due credit as being equal to the syndicate features, not inferior to them at all. In certain cases (like Captain Marvel and Company), those stories were sometimes real masterpieces that the newspaper crowd never achieved. We were rip-roaring pioneers with all the inspiration and creativity that comes with it!"



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Several comic "sweat" shops were operating at the time, as well as a number of smaller studios where three or four individual artists had grouped together for production purposes. They had all been caught up in the comic explosion detonated by Superman, Batman, and Captain America, and were working at a frenetic pace to keep up with the demand. Armed only with an idea, a knack for salesmanship, and his enormous confidence (sometimes called an inflated ego by his associates), Jack Binder made his move and quit the Chesler shop.

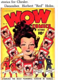
"After several years with Chesler," he explained, "I saw the progress comics were making as a steady source of income. Having been involved in the medium for a number of years, it was only natural for me to branch out on my own. Everybody in the business knew me—Street & Smith, Fawcett, all the rest—so when I made the move, I was flooded with work. And, once I started, I couldn't back out—I had to do it!"

September 1940, Binder began lining up accounts on his own—Joe Simon fed him some Timely work, Centaur, Street & Smith, Fawcett, and others including Chesler gave him his first freelance jobs. That month he turned out 58 pages of comic art for a total of $407.00. He collected $225.00. The following month, he produced 38 pages for $188.00. He collected some additional money for the previous month but discovered $195.00 was still due. He carried the balance over again to the following month. He found out that being in business for himself wasn't going to be quite as easy as he had planned.

But then, comics were booming. Even if the checks came in late, it was still money in the bank, right?

Wrong!!

In November 1940, Centaur announced bankruptcy. Binder took a loss for $106.00. Still he had six clients on a more-or-less steady basis and all the work he could handle. That month, more certain than ever he had made the right move, he hired his first employee, artist Bernie Klein. Then he began buying scripts from Carl Formes, an ex-opera singer who, around the age of 60, had broken into the business writing stories for Chesler.


WOW
COMICS
STARRING THE MOST POWERFUL HEROINE IN COMICS
MARY MARVEL THE SHAZAM GIRL!

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December. Herbert "Red" Holmdale added his abilities to the operation. Then Frank Frollo and Dan Dameron. More and more assignments were delegated to the small staff. A Patriot story at $10.00 a page. Cloud Curtis at $12.00. A nine-page Bulletman story at $10.00 a page for penciling and inking. Nick Carter got the same rate, while Doc Savage and Danny Garrett paid $12.00. Captain America was inked at $4.50 a page.

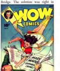
Binder couldn't get the work out fast enough. "I was praying for someone to show up because we were working around the clock. Suddenly, there was a knock on the door. It was Pete Riss who asked, 'Do you have any work?' I said 'There's a table—start drawing!' He didn't leave the house for five years."

Pete Riss was almost a member of the Binder family. He was a quiet, slow-speaking man who expressed himself much better with drawings than with words. As an artist, he was the most consistant and dependable in the shop and eventually became one of the staff's top figure artists. He was interested in fine art and classical music (the other staffers grumbled endlessly whenever Riss played it on the radio). His own personality tended to be calm and cool. One evening, after the shop had relocated to New Jersey, Riss came into the living room, sat down, casually lit his pipe, and announced the garage was on fire.

Jack and his family lived in a 5-story walk-up on 175th Street and St. Nicholas Avenue in Washington Heights. He had started working alone, quite a change from the turmoil of the Chesler shop. But not for long.

Others joined the new staff regularly until the corners of the Binder's dining room, bedroom and even the kitchen were brimming with brushes, pencils, comic pages, and artists whose lives had become an endless succession of drawing, sleeping, drawing, eating and drawing. Jack's wife, Olga, worked around the clock to keep the crew supplied with food and drink. Then Otto and his new bride moved in, and the operation was complete.

By March of 1941, the shop's output had grown to 95 pages a month, a total of $1,150.00 worth of work. Newcomers included Dave Berns, Arnold Hicks, Ben Nee, and Elmer Stoner, one of the few black artists to work in the comics. The apartment was bursting at the seams, and business was expanding at an even faster rate. Binder pondered the problem as he watched the traffic snarl across the George Washington Bridge. The solution was right in front of him all the time. He spent the next few weeks moving directly across the Hudson River to Englewood, New Jersey. Officially, the Jack Binder shop was open for business.



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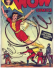
Jack had located a large home with a barn (or, more properly, a carriage house) standing behind it. The structure would be perfect, he felt, for an art studio. The entire set-up rented for $75.00 a month. By June, a host of new artists, inkers and letterers had joined the ranks: Bill Ward, Ken Bald, Al Plastino, Rod Wilkerson, Dick Rylands, Vince Costello, Kurt Schaffenberger, John Westlake, Al Duca, Jim Potter, Bob Butts, Rod Parkinson, Sid Davignon, Nat Champlin, and Ray Harford.

After working in the shop for a month, Ken Bald officially became art director, replacing Pete Riss who had temporarily assumed the position through his seniority. It was Bald who, perhaps more than any of the others, was responsible for meshing the many individual styles of dozens of artists into what would become known as the "Binder Shop Style".

Bald was born in New York City on August 1, 1920, and like many comic draftsmen, grew up under the influence of Foster's Tarzan and Raymond's Flash Gordon. His early endeavors at the A. B. Davis High School were impressive enough to win him a three-year scholarship to the Pratt Art Institute. It was there that Bald met others like Duca, Schaffenberger, Ray Harford, and Vic Dowd, all students who would soon become shop staffers.

It was Bill Ward who introduced Bald to the Binder Studio. Crowley remembered Bald's "flair for main figures and his development of a smooth inking style" that qualified him to fill the key position of art director. Besides coaching a bullpen crowded with raw, unpolished talent, he somehow managed to turn out a remarkable number of pages for the shop's clients. Jim Potter functioned as his assistant.



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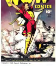
In December 1942, Bald joined the Marines,and while in the service, married Vic Dowd's sister, Kay. When he returned to the States in February 1946, Bald joined the Beck-Costanza shop for several months, then decided to freelance for other companies. He worked for the American Comic Group, supplying them with a considerable amount of covers (which paid more than interior pages).

At Timely, editor Stan Lee switched Bald from straight adventure material to teenage books like *Millie the Model*. He began writing the book in addition to drawing it during a trip to France. About this time, Bald linked up with Johnstone & Cushing, an advertising firm which specialized in comic-type art and line drawings. By 1952, Bald was producing industrial comics at $150.00 a page, quite a difference from the Binder shop days.

In 1957, he started his first syndicated strip for King Features, Judd Saxon. Then, in 1962, he initiated the Dr. Kildare strip (with Al Capp's brother, Elliot Kaplan writing). Bald's compelling innovative style on Kildare helped thrust it high on newspaper comics sales charts. He augmented that style slightly to produce the short-run Dark Shadows strip in 1971. "I always was a Lovecraft fan," he admitted. On both sides of the comic fence, Ken Bald's contribution has made him an important figure in the history of pictorial storytelling.



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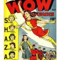
"The shop was open from eight in the morning to eight in the morning," Jack Binder remembers. "People began to get suspicious about the lights being on all night long. The neighbors must have thought we were a Nazi spy nest."

But just the opposite was true; they were an anti-Nazi spy nest, turning out propaganda features like Captain Battle, The Destroyer, Black Owl, Ibis, Bulletman, Blackstone, The Hooded Wasp, Mr. Scarlet, The Hunchback, and Captain Fury. Their methods varied from the usual shop system which often required artists to pencil, ink and, sometimes, write their own strips. Though it was standard procedure to use different pencillers and inkers on the same job, Binder would frequently use several men to do both functions if the deadline was tight.

Nevertheless, the shop was making little money, and during slack periods, losing money. Everyone was on a flat weekly payroll basis. Something had to be done. Binder called his attorney, John Rottenberg, for advice. He, in turn, contacted Sol Levin, a public accountant, who studied the production system and recommended the shop adopt a "piece work" system.



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Together, Binder, Wendell Crowley (the shop's editor), and art director Ken Bald worked out the new system. They broke down the composition of the comic page into eight catagories:

ROUGHS—The layout of panels on the page and the placement of figures therein. $1.00 per page.

PENCIL BACKGROUNDS—Details of interior and exterior settings. Newcomers started here at $.75

PENCIL SECONDARY FIGURES —Those subordinate to the main action. $1.00 per page.

PENCIL MAIN FIGURES—Only the best artists got this job. $1.00

INK BACKGROUNDS — Some panels were all background. The inker got $1.25 a page.

INK SECONDARY FIGURES—Minor figure work paid $1.00 a page.

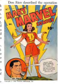
INK MAIN FIGURES — These were handled by the shop's slickest renderers for $1.00 a page.

LETTERING—Paid $.75 a page and an additional $.60 for the heading on the "splash" page.

The revised system worked. From among the staff, men were selected to take over the various positions, sometimes doubling on others. The concept was basically sound. Good inkers who were poor draftsmen were now able to do only their best work. On a piece work basis, a man could do as much or as little as he wanted. For instance, Pete Riss was top penciller the first month of the system and earned $340. Bob Butts was close with $331. Ken Bald was next with $150, and Bill Ward followed with $137.

An excellent example of Binder's mass production method can be made by citing the artists who worked on a 10-page Captain Midnight story. Clem Weisbecker roughed-out the job with the exception of the splash page. That page was layed-out by John Speanger who also pencilled the main and secondary figures, and the backgrounds. Len Frank inked the splash page and all the figures on seven other pages. Ralph Canales inked the figure work on the remaining two pages. George Harrison, George Thurston, Owen Middleton, Gerry Altman, and Walter Popp split background inking on nine pages between themselves. Then Jerry Landy lettered the job. Total cost: $75.60.

Don Rico described the operation as it existed when he worked there. "The shop was set-up with long tables, against which the artists would prop their small drawing boards. Working from a script, I'd rough out the page layouts in pencil and pass it along down the line where others would tighten up the figures and draw in the backgrounds. It would continue around the shop, being inked and lettered. Then, a few hours later, the page would come back completed. The place itself was a huge, barn-like house with a big attic where the men would work. Chas. Adams could have lived there!"



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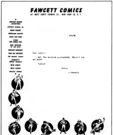
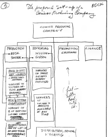
Wendell Crowley, of course, was one of the shop's key men. Alongside Binder and Bald, he was equally responsible for the quality and quantity of comic material produced in the shop.

Born in September 1921, Crowley began his writing career as a reporter for the *Herald News* in Ridgewood, New Jersey. After graduating from the University of Oklahoma, he tried out a number of jobs before



**FAWCETT COMICS**
67 WEST FORTY-FOURTH ST., NEW YORK 18, N. Y.



⑤ The proposed Set-up of a Comics Producing Company BECK

COMICS PRODUCING COMPANY

PRODUCTION
BECK
BINDER

EDITORIAL
SCULLIN
GIBSON

PROMOTION
GROSSMAN

FINANCE

BASIC & COST. ART WORKERS
SERVICES OF SIXTEEN ARTISTS ALREADY EMPLOYED.

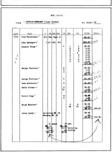
BECK & COSTANZA STUDIO SERVICE
SERVICES OF 8 OF BEST ALREADY EMPLOYED

SERVICES OF THREE WRITERS ALREADY EMPLOYED

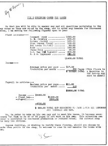
SERVICES OF WRITERS & ARTISTS AVAILABLE AT ANY TIME

DISTRIBUTION, PRINTING & ENGRAVING

fill in after conf. with Al.



TITLE: CAPTAIN MIDNIGHT (Giant Glider)



By W. Crowley

FIXED BUSINESS COSTS PER MONTH

So that you will be able to answer any and all questions pertaining to the pay rates as they now stand in the shop, and to spike any demands for increased rates, I am making the following figures open to you:

Fixed expenses----

| | |
|---|---|
| Leonard Frank | 300.00 |
| W. R. Crowley | 200.00 |
| Norman Steckel | 100.00 |
| Elsa Greene (Sozy) | 100.00 |
| Sol Levin (C.P.A.) | 50.00 |
| Rent | 150.00 |
| Phone Bill | 50.00 |
| S.S. Tax (on Payroll) | 200.00 |
| G. & A. Expenses | 250.00 |
| | $1400.00 TOTAL |

Income----

Average price per page .... $17.00
Production per month ...... 300 Pages
$ 5100.00 TOTAL (This figure is a keystone in the set-up and must be made!)

Payroll to artists----

Maximum price per page..... $11.00
Production per month ..... 300
$3300.00 TOTAL

Income ..... $5100.00
- Fixed Exp... $1400.00
- Payroll..... 3300.00
-4700.00
$ 400.00 TOTAL NET REMAINING TO JACK AFTER ALL EXPENSES AND PAYROLLS ARE MET.

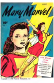
So, in order to make up his own pay and to meet his taxes, it becomes necessary for Jack to do 40 or 50 pages of art work on his own. This situation can only be alleviated by increased production or reduced rates. The correct step is only too obvious.

Anyone doubting, or wishing to verify these figures, should you choose to make them public in the shop, is welcome to come in and examine the books with me.

Memo, proposed organization breakdown, production sheet, and expense record from the files of the Binder Art Studio.

joining the Jack Binder shop as writer and editor in mid-1941. He remembered it like this:

"When Fawcett expanded their comic line, their own art department could not keep up with the work. So they farmed it out, mostly to Chesler at first. This was because Ed Herron, the editor who made Fawcett what it was, had formerly worked for Harry "A" Chesler. But Fawcett wasn't satisfied with the job that Chesler's men did, especially on Captain Marvel. Chesler had his own books in the late 30's. He had the whole comics business in the palm of his hand at one time. All the greats went through his shop on West 23rd Street; but somehow he missed his big chance.


Mary Marvel
10¢
The Story of the Year!

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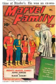
"Jack Binder worked for Chesler even before Fawcett went into the comics business. Harry produced material for most of the major publishers of the day and Jack became his first art director before going out on his own.

"My pal Bill Ward got me a summer job with Binder when I was home from college in 1941. The pay was good, better than graduates were getting then. So I stayed and worked up. Fawcett editor Henry Perkins used to refer to Jack Binder as 'backside Binder the bushman.' The Binder shop work often used such tricks as rear views (saved the slow work of drawing likenesses) and bushes from behind which balloons issued (saved the even slower work of figure drawing.) Take a look at some of the old books and you'll see.

"Jack actually never did too much art work himself after he had his shop going. About all he did was go over the final work and touch it up a bit. Eventually he did not even do this much, all the work being done by his men. To begin with, Pete Riss did the final checking as Jack's art director, but eventually Ken Bald took over that position. If you think Jack's style is obvious in the old Fawcett books it is only because his shop had a 'style' governed mostly by Pete and Ken on main figures and Ward's layouts.

"But you can find all sorts of other styles in the Binder shop work. Andre LeBlanc, for instance, contributed much, as did John Sprangger. Ray Harford got to be so good at drawing Captain Marvel at Binder's shop that he was called to work in the Fawcett shop under Beck. Bob Boyajian went along with him but he was mostly a background man. Ward was also offered a job but refused. He went with Quality for more money.

"Harry Anderson worked for some time at Binder's. He was an ex-seaman and had many other odd jobs, but was an excellent artist who eventually did Lance O'Casey for Fawcett, in addition to Nyoka and Bulletman. I can't recall at the moment whether he did that under Jack or went on his own. I rather expect that he did it at Jack's shop in the days when it was at 507 Fifth Avenue in New York City.


Marvel Family Comics
10¢
Mighty Marvel Family Joins Forces vs. Black Adam!

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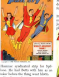
"All these fellows were green artists in the beginning, more interested in baseball and girls, whose abilities in those directions, at any rate, far exceeded their art talents.

"Binder and Chesler, along with Eisner and Iger, and Jacquet, ran the shops in the early days—and without such places, many of the great artists of today's and yesterday's comics never would have had the chance to develop. I know from personal experience the greatness of Jack's teaching abilities. The fact that he finally became a teacher testifies to this."

Crowley started at the Binder shop as a delivery boy but soon began turning out scripts. He wrote Cloud Curtis, The Black Owl, Bulletman, and the Flying Dutchman at $2.50 a page besides overseeing a bullpen crowded with talent. When Beck needed help editing his material a year or so later, Crowley joined that shop, then switched to Fawcett where much of his work was appearing. He was hired to replace editor Stanley Kauffman.

"It was the Beck influence and genius," Crowley continued, "that guided Captain Marvel throughout his career. Otto Binder, Woolfolk, Wellman, Herron and Millard among others contributed mightily in the writing. I didn't come along as editor until *Captain Marvel Adventures* 36 although I worked for Binder as far back as *Captain Marvel Adventures* 3 or 4.

"Eddie Robbins started in the old Fawcett shop, went into the army, came out and worked for Beck and Costanza, then went on his own, coming up with some very original art work on romance comics. He later tried his hand at writing Bob Swift, ably pencilled by Clem Weisbecker and inked by Bob Butts, both former Binder men. Ed had started out with Jacquet too. There he met Al Fagely (There Oughta Be A Law) among others, including Mickey Spillane. Ed later did the Mike Hammer syndicated strip for Spillane. He had Butts with him as an inker before the thing went blotto.



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"As far as shop stages were concerned, the tendency was to give the work more and more to freelancers rather than to shops as the years went by. Shops were unable to hold on. Irwin Schoffman, however, did not have a shop in the real sense of the word. He gave the work to freelancers, just as Fawcett did."

Crowley himself was a giant of a man, towering a full 6'8" tall. He had a booming voice that could rock a room, especially when he got excited about something. In a way, he was much like the larger than life characters that populated the books he edited. Perhaps because of this or maybe in spite of it, Wendell saw the whimsical side of everything and would roar with laughter at things the uninitiated would miss completely. But then, how many of us grew up identifying with Goliath instead of David?

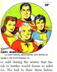
As an editor, Crowley took the same approach. Talking tigers and world-wrecking worms might have had considerable trouble getting past most editors' desks—but not Crowley's. Quite the contrary, he encouraged such things, and more often than not, inspired them as well.

He was totally committed to the comic medium, probably more than any other Captain Marvel editor. His enthusiasm showed in his work and was certainly a contributing factor to keeping Marvel flying high all during his career.

When Fawcett stopped publishing comics in 1953, Crowley took over his father's lumber business. Two years earlier he had married Will Lieberson's secretary, Dagne Weste. Wendell soon began raising his own Marvel Family.

It was no secret that Crowley loved comics. He relished his last fling at them during his collaboration with Beck and Binder on Will Lieberson's *Fat Man* and *Super Green Beret* comics. Wendell never let on for a moment that he knew the clock couldn't be turned back. He passed away in February 1970, due to post-operative complications for open-heart surgery.

Kurt Schaffenberger was another Pratt Institute graduate. He commuted from Brooklyn to the New Jersey studio until he and Nat Champlin found rooms closer to it. "It was so cold during the winter that the ink in bottles would freeze to solid ice. We had to thaw them before we could work. But in the summer, the ink would be fine. Instead, we had to battle the horseflies."


The Marvel Family
10¢
Starring Capt. Marvel
and Mary Marvel, Uncle Marvel, Capt. Marvel Jr.

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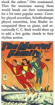
Binder was a strict disciplinarian who made each man responsible for his own work. "Don't come to me unless you're stuck—and make sure you're stuck!" was his advice to new employees. He ran such a tight shop that when payday came around, the thirty or so men on the staff would line-up in military fashion, click heels together, salute with arms outstretched and shout, "Heil, payday!"

Yet the shop wasn't all work. During extended lunch hours and after dinner, the staffers went outside for a few innings of baseball. Some days, the Fawcett crew, Ed Herron, Will Lieberson, Rod Reed, Mac Raboy and others would show up, then the ball playing would really begin. Baseball became so popular that Mrs. Binder dared not hang out the family wash until a game would be called on account of work.

Otto recalled, "Just for the record, Mac Raboy was our star fielder. You wouldn't expect that seemingly ungainly, rather morose, totally unathletic art high-brow to handle a ball and bat, let alone play well. But out on the field he was supremely graceful and could run like a deer after a fly ball. We began to hate him. What a ball hawk!"

The shop's evening get-togethers were another matter. Carl Formes would give a sampling of his career as an operatic baritone. "His voice shook the rafters." Otto reminisced. Then the musicians among them would break out their instruments for a bit more popular music: Crowley played accordian, Schaffenberger played concertina, Iona Binder accompanied them on piano, and occasionally C. C. Beck would show up to add a few guitar chords to their rhythm section.


The Marvel Family
10¢
Captain Marvel — Captain Marvel Jr. — Mary Marvel
Fight the Last Vikings!

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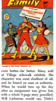
The bulk of the work produced by the Binder shop was done for Street & Smith and Fawcett who were followed by Nedor, Prize, New Friday Publications and various other comic publishers. By the end of 1942, they were averaging over 380 pages per month—their output that year, a whopping 4,325 complete pencilled and inked pages.

During the years he ran his own comic art studio, Binder employed over 100 men, generally maintaining a staff of about 30. The top production pencillers in the operation included Ken Bald, Al Bare, Bob Butts, Vic Dowd, Leonard Frank, Andre LeBlanc, Pete Riss, Kurt Schaffenberger, John Spranger, Bill Ward, and Clem Weisbecker.

Of them all, Weisbecker was perhaps the fastest and most prolific when he wanted to be. Otto Binder, who wrote many of the scripts, described him straightforwardly:

"Weisbecker was a fabulous character. He looked and talked like a gangster. He was born ugly and had a case of small pox that had pitted his skin, but when he took a pencil in his hand everybody watched in reverence. His color paintings were even better—far better. Many sold at Village sidewalk exhibits. His character was most ebullient of all, and he feared no man or authority. When he would turn up the day after an assignment was given him with a whole 8-page story pencilled, Will Lieberson would say, 'Didn't you kind of rush this, Clem? After all, we're paying you good money to take your time and . . .' Clem would sneer and interrupt, 'Ah, you know my work is worth ten times the f----g money you give me. And look, I need a check by 4:00 today, see!'



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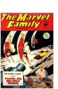
"He always got the check, and more work, for his pencils were better than any other artist taking a week. Clem's language almost required the girl editors to wear earmuffs. Every third word was a cussword of the rawest variety. When 'shusshed' by some male editor, Clem would lower his froggy voice to a whisper that was still heard by every girl within 100 feet as he vented some more cuss-talk.

"And 'Clem's Classic', which Wendell Crowley always liked to tell, occurred when Clem showed Wendell one of his paintings (his real love, of course) which he had arisen early to do and said, 'Wen, isn't that the G-d d---dest best sunrise you ever saw?' Clem was dead serious. Wendell doubled with laughter. Clem said frowningly, 'Whattamatta? Haven't you any sense of ---- ---- ---- ---- beauty in your soul?' God knows how Wendell ever recovered.



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"But beast and the beauty—they were blended in Clem in a strange and awesome way.

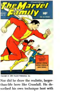
"Unfortunately, perhaps due to a tough-kid childhood and grinding poverty, and the wrong companionship in the crummiest part of the Village, Clem became a drinking problem (losing a wife by divorce in the meantime) and one day we heard the shocking news—death from drinking.

"Another master in comics was gone. Too many occurred, including suicides. But any art field (or creative area) must have its overabundant percentage of unstable people. It was even surmised that the comics ruined Clem, in that the sudden change from rags to riches, for several years, might have led to his hitting the bottle too much—but who knows the real story."

Others who took up pencil and pen in the Binder shop included Ray Abel, Jack Alderman, Harry Anderson, Dan Barry, Bob Boyajian, Ann Brewster, S. H. Brooks, Walter Chapman, Charles Coll, Lincoln Cross, Walter Darr, Harry Daugherty, A. M. Froehlich, Gus Hamden, Ken Jackson, Gloria Kamen, Bette Kathe, Eli Katz, Winsor McCay Jr., Sam Nisenson, Munson Paddock, Ed Poucher, Clarence Rousch, Gus Schrotter, Art Scott, Marcia Snyder, Jimmy Thompson, Charlie Tomsey, Ernest Townsend, and many more.

When the shop was well under way, Jack went back to Chicago to recruit his brothers for the shop. Earl had a good job and declined the offer, but Curley Binder decided to give it a try. He sold the store he had opened, and returned with Jack to New York. In the shop, Curley was an all-around man, writing a number of stories but was more a salesman than a scriptwriter. After a year, he took a straight salesman's job and eventually bought into the hotel business. But when he was associated with Otto and Jack, Fawcett editors were known to walk through the halls mumbling, "Binders! Binders! Everywhere!!"

While he operated his shop, Jack Binder did a minimum of art work, his time and energy consumed by the details of production, bookkeeping, deadlines, and generally keeping the agency running efficiently. As a draftsman, his work was better than average but as a comic artist he lacked the elements of exaggeration that typified men like Beck or Kirby. Nor did he draw the realistic, larger-than-life hero like Crandall. He described his own technique best with the statement: "My art was never noisy!"



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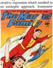
Binder's visualization of stories often lacked the cohesiveness of solid continuity, a factor which almost demands an artist write his own material. He never applied the cinematic approach to his comics which perhaps weakened them dramatically. Even though they were well-drawn, his panels and figures were static in content. One of the best examples of his work appears in a Street & Smith one-shot entitled *Remember Pearl Harbor*. In the center of the book (written by brother Otto in three days), is Binder's inspirational double-page spread, the issue's patriotic highlight.

First and foremost, Jack Binder was an artist. Yet the history of comics will record his greatest contribution on a much larger scale—as an organizer of men who promoted a mass production technique never used before. By producing thousands of pages of comic art, Binder and his staff filled the void created by a story-hungry public.

His working principle was simple: To furnish the consistant quality and fast production comics needed. His system eliminated any high or low points while producing a standard volume of work. "If a publisher called and said he needed 50 pages overnight, we could do it," Binder stated. "I had it figured right down to the last brushstroke how many hours it would take. I'm proud to have been involved in comics. Beginning with Ken Bald, I started so many artists in the business who are now prominent successes that I've lost count."

The synthetic techniques used in the production shop were a necessity in the 40's. To be sure, they had their negative aspects. The patchwork approach lacked individual creative expression which resulted in an antiseptic approach. Anonymity was the cornerstone as draftsmen worked for a common denominator without fancy embellishments. The ambiguous style evolved in a manner analogous to National's in the 50's where artists were persuaded to emulate Dan Barry, or like Marvel artists worked in the Kirby style in the 60's. They were all practical systems which could never improve the form—commercially successful, artistically unsuccessful. In retrospect, we must laud not the work but the idea behind it.



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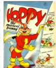
Binder had a standing order at Pratt Institute to hire their best graduates. So many of his staff came from the school that its president suggested Jack initiate a comic art course. Binder had ads running in newspapers all over the country to find men. "Things got so busy after awhile," Jack remembers, "I finally hired women."

"Jack was the first," Otto Binder revealed, "to break down the comics into those many categories, picking the best specialist for each. The astonishing thing was that most of it came out looking so uniform, like the style of one man, instead of a horrible hodge-podge. That, of course, took rigid inspection of each man and each step, by Jack, Ken Bald, and Wendell Crowley, his editor (and art hawk).



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"Wendell was an earnest chap who would scream bloody murder if any artist messed up what he was doing. 'You got two left hands!' Wendell would roar and the whole studio would shake. The poor artist looked at his own hands before he realized Wendell meant in the drawing. But aside from being the 'shop terror' in criticism, and Jack's right-hand 'bulldog', Wendell, was about the nicest kind of guy you could meet—genial (off hours), talking intelligently, laughing at jokes, etc. But once he clumped up those stairs into the studio-loft, hearts quaked and faces paled and each artist hurriedly looked over his sheet with the horrid fear of seeing the super-hero with three eyes or his slip showing.

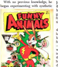
"But it was that kind of steady discipline, plus Ken Bald's superb guidance to the layout men and his constant watch for interesting scenes and pages, that kept the shop's business rising like a rocket—until the war began to draft away those young talented men. By the mid-40's, the shop was a shrunken morgue and only had a short revival in New York City for a while before Jack disbanded it altogether."

In 1943, because of the difficulty in getting to Englewood, New Jersey, Binder transferred his staff to 507 5th Avenue in Manhattan. The war years were taking their toll and the shop was losing men to the draft as fast as they could be hired. Page production had dropped to about 200 a month, often less. Paper shortages had also helped cause a steady decline of the comic market. By late 1943, the shop had eroded away to 17 men. Expenses began to outweigh the profits. Binder made the decision to disband the operation.

Jack kept a few accounts for himself and recommended his remaining employees to various publishers. For the next few years, he acted as a sales agent for the Beck-Costanza shops, in addition to drawing countless Mary Marvel tales. An outstanding example of his work appeared on the cover of that comic, which features the lady Whiz Kid astride a mammoth butterfly. He continued at Fawcett until 1953, his final work done on the Gabby Hayes series.

In late 1948, Binder had moved to Warrensburg, New York, onto a 60-acre farm where he and his sons became gentlemen farmers. After he retired from the comics completely, Jack Binder, at 50, began an entirely new field of endeavor—commercial outdoor sculpture.

With no previous knowledge, he began experimenting with synthetic materials, creating both human and animal figures. Soon he was accepting assignments from summer resorts, dude ranches, and motels to build made-to-order outdoor displays, from the smallest elves to a colossal 14-foot viking.



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Otto Binder related the details:

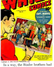
"Jack's work was absolutely unique in that he devised his own plastic compositions for molding figures. He haunted plastic plants and bought big barrels of the liquid type, huge sheets of the board type, and bails of the 'cottony' type. These he blends together in his own formulas, shaping them around steel or wire frameworks to get to the final human figure. He uses polyethylines, acrylics, polyesters, and casein ingredients for his mixes and blends. They are weather-proof and never lose their colors (another secret of his).

"His biggest job was making all the life-size figures of the soldiers of the French and Indian Wars for Fort William Henry, near Lake George Village, New York. These included literally dozens of British, French, and Indian warriors in separate exhibits of how they ate, drank, handled the wounded, packed ammunition—all authentic from historical works of the region.

"To make the military uniforms of the British Redcoats or French Armee, he has to take dry goods, fix them in plastic, and paint them the proper colors. He also makes imitation belts that look like real leather. One of his wood-based guns, complete with bogus sights and triggers had a collector all excited until he picked it up and felt how light it was. Jack also made hams and smoked meats to be hung in the window of a butcher shop, which people constantly ordered—until they were convinced they were counterfeits. Then, when the fort burned down accidentally some years ago, Jack was commissioned to replace all those figures and add new ones. His huge shop, at that time a converted garage, was simply jammed with figures in various stages of construction.

"It's all a sort of 'one-man factory' that is fascinating to people who browse around for hours sometimes. In utter contrast, Jack has hung up framed paintings, his "serious" work—landscapes, portraits etc., many of which he has also sold for prices in the hundreds. It makes one think of a Walt Disney version of Santa's workshop—and sometimes the dwarfs are there too, on order for some kiddyland place or a mini-golf course."

Jack Binder was not the kind of man to let things happen—he made things happen. And, in so doing, changed the course of comic history.



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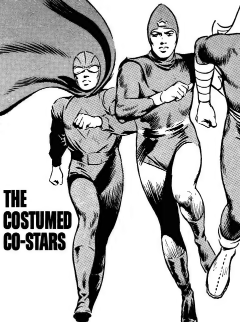
In a way, the Binder brothers had much in common with the Marvel family—hadn't old Shazam's lightning struck them and changed their lives too! The Binders (don't forget Curley) might be called the first family of comics. Couldn't the same be said for the Marvels? The history of comics will record them both as super-families.

Who says lightning doesn't strike twice?

# THE COSTUMED CO-STARS

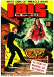


Depending on how you look at it, comics did almost as much for Fawcett as Fawcett did for comics. The story of how it all came about really began in September 1919, the date of Fawcett's first publication – the man who was responsible for it, Wilfred H. Fawcett.

Wilfred (Billy to his friends) had embarked on the first adventure in his career at the tender age of sixteen when he ran away from home to join the army. He craved excitement, but what chance did he possibly have of finding any in the small North Dakota town where his father, John Fawcett, was a resident doctor? None, he speculated, as he signed up as a private to serve in the Philippine Insurrection.

The action proved more than he bargained for when, during the fighting, a fierce Moro tribesman severely wounded the young American in the knee with a wavy-bladed kris. After prolonged treatment of the injury, Army doctors advised amputation. Lose a leg? Hell, no! Billy told the medics where to go.

After securing an honorable discharge, he boarded a train to Mexico determined to locate a particular surgeon he once heard had mended broken bones and saved doomed limbs. His gamble paid off and soon, with the help of the doctor's skill, Billy Fawcett was back on his two feet again. Thankful to be in one piece, he returned to the States and decided to try his luck at another adventure – he got married.


WHIZ COMICS' MIRACLE MAN!
IBIS
THE INVINCIBLE
10¢
68 PAGES OF EXCITING IBIS ADVENTURES

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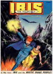
In no time at all, he was raising a family in Minneapolis, Minnesota on his eighty-dollar-a-month pay as a railway mail clerk. His needs, however, exceeded his salary, so young Bill decided to take another job to subsidize his income. He wanted a job with a promising future. It was time to take inventory, and as Bill weighed his ambitions against his talents, he discovered he had little to offer. Even his brief Army service was almost useless. Then he recalled that his Army buddies had suggested he become a writer of jokes. He had always been a heavy reader and a first class storyteller, often writing down the material he gathered from various sources.

The romance of the printed word definitely appealed to him. He tried a long shot and applied for a job at the night copy desk on the *Minneapolis Tribune*. When asked for references, Billy mumbled something about his writing experience in the service. The bluff worked, so well in fact that no one ever suspected he was new at that sort of thing.

He worked hard and was finally promoted to the rank of reporter on the news staff. With his new status, Fawcett quit his mail clerk job and concentrated on making a reputation for himself in the Twin Cities area. It paid off when he landed the job of city editor of the *Winnipeg Free Press* in Canada. No doubt about it, his career was on the move.


IBIS
THE INVINCIBLE
10¢
In This Issue: IBIS and the MYSTIC SNAKE PEOPLE!

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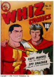
Then news headlines revealed that WW2 had been declared. Impulsively, Fawcett quit his job and enlisted in the Army, this time as a captain. For the next few years, he continued to collect and expand his repository of humor and, after the war, headed back to Minneapolis where he opened the Army and Navy Club. Veterans and civilians alike patronized the club where Fawcett was always on hand to greet and entertain them with the latest jokes and stories.



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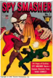
SPY SMASHER
No. 1
10¢
64 Pages of Exciting SPY SMASHER Stories— Famous Character from WHIZ COMICS!

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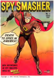
But even he couldn't be everywhere at once. So, in order to capitalize on the popularity he had established because of his congenial sense of humor, Fawcett produced a mimeographed bulletin brimming with a man's kind of humor. The bulletin became a favorite with traveling salesmen who picked them up in the club, memorized the jokes, and retold them to potential customers.

In addition, Fawcett distributed his humor sheet to veterans' hospitals where disabled soldiers chuckled over the gags and anecdotes. Captain Billy's fame spread, and requests came in from hospitals across the country. Newspapers began to quote from the material to liven up their own content. Soon the bulletin was in so much demand that free distribution became impossible.


SPY SMASHER
No. 2
WINTER ISSUE
10¢
DEATH TO SPIES IN AMERICA!
NEW ADVENTURES OF SPY SMASHER, HERO OF WHIZ COMICS

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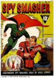
It was at this point that Captain Billy conceived the idea which became the cornerstone of his publishing empire – a pocketsize book of jokes that would sell for twenty-five cents. Next, he sold the idea to a local printer who bankrolled the operation for $5,000. Their plan was to distribute the magazines to stores and hotels throughout Minneapolis. Their initial print run was 5,000 copies, which the family wrapped, counted, and bundled in the Fawcett apartment's kitchen. The books were delivered by wagon.

Within a half year, the magazine was selling 500,000 copies a month. Captain Billy, who expected his success to fade away at any moment, quickly bought a house. At least he'd have something to show for his prosperity. For once, he was wrong. Sales climbed!

Soon he gathered the entire Fawcett family into his operation. His brother, Roscoe, a sports editor for the *Portland Oregonian*, joined Captain Billy's sons, Wilfred Jr., Roger, Roscoe, and Gordon, in the new operation. They established their headquarters in Robbinsdale, Minnesota, erected an office building, and settled down to some serious publishing.


SPY SMASHER
10¢
FEATURING SPY SMASHER, HERO OF WHIZ COMICS

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Fawcett had dedicated his cartoon and joke magazine to the armed services where he had gathered much of the humor material. He christened the book *Whiz-Bang*, named after a powerful artillery shell. The title was appropriate because Captain Billy's first shot was heard around the publishing world. "He ran his little business just like an army," revealed Al Allard who functioned as the firm's art director from 1928 until his retirement in 1970.

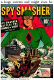
Not long afterward came other books like *Mechanix Illustrated*, *True Confessions*, and a number of motion picture fan magazines. With the enterprise in high gear and capably handled by his brother and four sons, Captain Billy decided to tour the world and do all the things he had always dreamed of doing—hunting big game in Africa, becoming a champion trap shooter, an aviator, a racing car driver.

The business continued to expand,

new titles were added, and the company moved its base of operations to Greenwich, Connecticut, to be closer to New York, the publishing capital of the world. When Roscoe Fawcett died in 1935, Captain Billy returned to head the operation until his own death in 1940. His four sons had moved into the top spots, each in a key position.

They were aided by Ralph Daigh who had started with them in Robbinsdale as editor of a pair of Fawcett pulps, *Triple X* and *Battle Stories*. Daigh moved to New York to work for Dell Publishing, then rejoined Fawcett when they also moved to the east. He functioned as editorial director for all publications produced by Fawcett, eventually becoming the firm's vice president.

Captain Billy's *Whiz-Bang*, of course, continued for decades to be a huge success and might even be considered a national institution in the same fashion as England's *Punch* or France's *La Parisienne*. So when Fawcett decided to make their entry in the comic world, out of tradition they named the book *Whiz Comics*. If the title had been lucky for them the first time around, it would be even more so this time.


SPY SMASHER
10¢
SPY SMASHER BATTLES THE SHARKS of STEEL!

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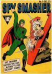
The Whiz Kids, the characters who appeared in that opening issue, all became stars in their own independent magazines and made Fawcett a leading publisher in the golden age history of comics.

Besides Captain Marvel, the book's number one strongman, *Whiz* 2 (remember the first issue was never released) featured a host of heroes, an even half dozen, assembled to cater to every kind of comic taste. The strip following Fawcett's super star presented a sorcerer who broke the traditional Mandrake mold among comic magicians—IBIS THE INVINCIBLE.


No. 9 DEC. 25
SPY SMASHER
10¢
SPY SMASHER BATTLES THE AXIS ...IN FOUR "V FOR VICTORY" YARNS!

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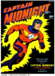
All early comic magazines seemed to regard having a magic strip as a regulation for getting their mailing permit. Most of them were shamelessly patterned after Lee Falk's newspaper strip, Mandrake. But a real effort was made to give Ibis (pronounced eye-biss) a distinctive appearance and origin.

The tale opened in the Egyptian wing of a famous American museum as a guard led a tour through some of the world's oldest artifacts. He stopped, pointing to an ornate sarcophagus. "This is the mummy of the young Prince Amentep, 12th Dynasty! We call him old man Ibis! Ibis was the sacred bird of ancient Egypt! That inscription under it means—'I will live again!'"

Long afterward, at midnight, the ancient mummy stirred and sat upright. Its bandaged hand clasped the Ibistick—"the most powerful weapon ever devised." The talisman jewel at one end enclosed the form of the sacred bird. In another moment, the swathed figure commanded that he be transported outside the glass case that surrounded him. Then he was reclothed—the crumbling wrappings were gone, in their place, a black suit and crimson turban.


CAPTAIN MIDNIGHT
10¢
ROCKETING FORWARD WITH CAPTAIN MIDNIGHT STRATO-ADMIRAL OF THE AIRWAYS

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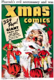
A caption explained, "Ibis' first thought is of the beautiful girl from whom death separated him 4,000 years before in ancient Egypt." His own words reiterated that thought. "Now I must find Princess Taia!" By the tale's cliffhanger conclusion, Ibis did indeed find his lost love, performing several miracles along the way.

The first issue of his own magazine, dated 1942, expanded the story into a fascinating origin obviously inspired by Universal Pictures' The Mummy. The tale introduced The Black Pharoah, and his noble rival, Prince Amentep, or Ibis for short. Though he had studied the ancient scrolls of forbidden Egyptian magic, Ibis was unable to thwart the Black Pharoah's evil necromancy and was imprisoned for his efforts. His only hope depended upon a ritual which demanded that his bravery be tested.



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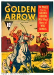
Now having proven his courage in crisis, a relative of Ibis' passed a powerful mystic wand through the bars of his cell. "It is called the Ibistick! It will do mighty magic for good purposes! It fails only against other magic—but I depend on your wisdom to fight that!" (This was a change from the early *Whiz* tales where the Ibistick could fail against nothing, and stories were absolutely without suspense as the Ibistick instantly overcame all obstacles).

Attacked by a demon in service to the Black Pharoah, Ibis called upon the Ibistick to give him a sword and shield with which to fight the creature. Meanwhile, the Pharoah was planning to make Ibis' beloved and half-clad Princess Taia his bride. (Her scanty blue halter revealed considerable detail about her well-developed personality. This costume in the early stories marked one of the few examples of comic eroticism in the entire Fawcett line.)


GOLDEN ARROW
10¢
54 PAGES Starring GOLDEN ARROW Wild West Hero of WHIZ COMICS
No. 11

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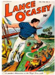
Suddenly, Ibis arrived and dispatched the Black Pharoah with a sword thrust. During the conflict, Taia was hit by an arrow in the most prominent part of her anatomy.

But instead of death, she fell into an enchanted sleep, one that would last for 4,000 years. Since he could not break the spell, the prince commanded the Ibistick to place him in a similar magic sleep. Centuries later, the swathed Ibis rose from his sarcophagus in a modern museum, and raised Taia from her own coffin (a variation of the *Whiz* origin).

Though Ibis adopted modern dress, Taia preferred her burlesque queen outfit. "Beloved, this world seems strange and terrible!" she said. Ibis agreed, "It is still full of evils, such as we never dreamed of! But with the Ibistick, we shall drive them away!"



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This new origin tale, written by Otto Binder, was one of Fawcett's best. The storyline was well developed, the setting imaginative, the characters interesting. It all contributed to the fact that Ibis conjured his way through 155 issues of *Whiz*, a half dozen of his own magazine, and a score of appearances in various other Fawcett publications.

Taking their lead from Bill Parker's original storyline, writers Binder, Woolfolk, Irwin Schoffman and Manly Wade Wellman populated the Ibis saga with scenes of vampires, human sacrifices, living nightmares, disembodied hands, werewolves, bat-winged demons, and rotting corpses from ancient Egypt—all right out of the pages of *Weird Tales*. Mac Raboy, Kurt Schaffenberger, Alex

Blum, Carl Pfeufer, and a score of others depicted the enigmatic Egyptian over the years, taking their lead from Beck and Costanza's original visualization.

The most successful feature in *Whiz* beside Captain Marvel was SPY SMASHER by Parker and Beck with Costanza assisting. Though he had no actual origin story, it might better be stated that he had a very long serialized origin. From the first, there was a standard opening splash panel of about a third-page showing Spy Smasher standing in the darkness, his face and uniform a shadowy silhouette, only his red cape and leather aviator's helmet with goggles standing out clearly. The uniform was apparently a soldier's outfit of World War 1 vintage–a dark brown tunic with khaki riding breeches like those of a cavalry officer. A broad belt and military boots of the same shade of brown completed the original costume.

The identity of Spy Smasher was not revealed to the reader. But it wasn't very difficult to guess; there was only one reasonable suspect.

The phantom aviator's first nemesis was one almost as difficult to nail permanently as Captain Marvel's foe, Sivana. He was named The Mask, a foreign master spy who wore a plain white mask over his face, like a handkerchief with eye-holes poked into it. In *Whiz Comics* 3, The Mask's gang shot down an airplane that carried the daughter of Navy Admiral Corby. Though presumed dead, she was actually captured by The Mask.

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FREE
10 ROLLFAST MOTORBIKES
100 PAIRS ROLLFAST SKATES
BIG CONTEST! IT'S FUN!
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"Heartbroken, Admiral Corby phones Alan Armstrong, Eve's fiance," a panel heading revealed. "I don't believe it," Alan said. In the very next panel: "That night the phantom Spy-Smasher–." He appeared in costume, headed for a strange egg-shaped ship, "his Gyrosub–a super craft which travels as fast as light on the ground, in the air or underwater".

With the luck of all comics heroes, Spy Smasher immediately located The Mask's hideout and saved Eve–and himself from being crushed in a giant metal stamping machine. The Mask had escaped. His face in shadows, Spy Smasher turned to Eve. "Before I go, promise you will never tell anybody who I am," he said as he shattered the unwritten superheroes' code which demanded they keep their identities hidden from their girl friends. Soon back home, she was questioned by her father. "But who is Spy Smasher, Eve?" Loyally, Eve replied, "I - I can't tell you."

WORLD'S BIGGEST COMICS BOOK
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Spy Smasher continued to battle The Mask through the next dozen issues of *Whiz* drawn with considerable tone and atmosphere by C. C. Beck and Pete Costanza from Parker's scripts.

By *Whiz* 15 (March 1941) Spy Smasher's costume fit much tighter in traditional super-hero fashion. The colors remained the same but a diamond-shaped chest emblem of midnight black was added. This story began as Spy Smasher managed to finish off the monstrous, Frankenstein-like Grosso by hurling him into a tangle of electrical wires. But The Mask, in the disguise of a cripple, battered Spy Smasher into unconsciousness with a well-aimed blow from one of his crutches.

GIANT TYPE! EASY TO READ!
MASTER COMICS
15¢
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The foe of America's enemies awoke to find himself tied to a chair, facing his masked nemesis. "While you were unconscious, I took the opportunity to remove your goggles and learn who you really are," The Mask sneered. It was true. "At last, The Mask has discovered that Spy Smasher really is Alan Armstrong, wealthy Virginia sportsman and fiance of Eve Corby."

Who else?

The story went on to tell how The Mask subjected Spy Smasher to his Brainograph, the ultimate brainwashing device. "I'm going to make you my first lieutenant. I'm twisting your brain so you'll work against the government! I want you to kill all the generals! Kill! Kill! Kill!"

The invention proved frighteningly successful. Spy Smasher came out from under it with only one thought in mind. "I'll kill! Kill! Kill!" And the nearest person to hand was The Mask himself. "No, have mercy! Don't kill me! Not Me!" The phantom flier reached out. The folds of his cloak hid his hands as they squeezed the life from The Mask.

GIANT TYPE! EASY TO READ!
MASTER COMICS
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The scene shifted to the morgue, where Admiral Corby stood over a sheeted form. "No doubt about it," he observed. "The Mask is dead! He was an international spy who used several aliases! He was probably the most dangerous adversary of the entire Secret Service!" After fifteen issues, The Mask was dead. He never returned. No relative, hireling or impersonator ever wore that white mask again. What lay beneath it, we were never allowed to see. His identity remained a mystery to a million disappointed readers.

Though The Mask was dead, the chain of events he had started continued to develop into an important new series. Still crazed, Spy Smasher was obsessed with the hypnotic command to destroy the American government. First he blew up an armory. Then he destroyed a bridge, sending a fleet of Army trucks and their human cargo crashing into the water below. He was seen trying to bomb a secret conference of Army and Navy officials. Admiral Corby and Eve realized that Spy Smasher had turned against the U.S.A. The admiral murmured, "Who can stop Spy Smasher?" The next symbolic panel answered that question. The mighty figure of Captain Marvel lifted his fist. "I'll stop Spy Smasher!"

The next three issues of *Whiz*, 16, 17 and 18 (April, May and June 1941) presented the epic combat between Captain Marvel and Spy Smasher. Each battle issue continued the fight from the Captain Marvel story to the Spy Smasher story further in the book. The entire confrontation was perhaps inspired by The Human Torch vs. Sub-Mariner issues of *Marvel Mystery Comics* a year earlier.

But the Fawcett fight was hardly as classic as the fire and water duel for the simple reason that Captain Marvel and Spy Smasher were by no means evenly matched. A toe-to-toe slug-fest between the two would have lasted only a couple of punches and a couple of panels. Spy Smasher had no super-human strength or invulnerability. The remarkable aspect about these issues of *Whiz* was seeing a pristine hero like Spy Smasher cunningly committing acts of arson and murder. The Sub-Mariner was always about equally as much a villain as a hero, and there were often suspicions about the actions of the Human Torch, as there was about many of the Timely characters. They all seemed to be working on the side of the law just until something better came along. But Spy Smasher had been a dedicated, altruistic patriot until The Mask's machine had twisted his mind.

WORLD'S BIGGEST COMICS MAGAZINE
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GIANT TYPE! EASY TO READ!
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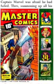
Spy Smasher's first move in *Whiz* 16 was to pass out guns–rifles, pistols, shotguns and ammunition–to all the convicts at a federal penitentiary. Captain Marvel made short work of the armed mob and gave chase to Spy Smasher and his Gyrosub. The craft became a submarine and dove beneath the ocean. When the World's Mightiest Mortal followed, a depth bomb set by Spy Smasher blew his pursuer out of the water but, of course, left him unharmed. Spy Smasher pulled alongside the floating form, and cracked Captain Marvel over the head with a rifle stock, so as not to take a chance. "Ha ha! That tickles! Hope I can keep from laughing out loud," the mighty Marvel chuckled to himself.

Spy Smasher took the supposedly unconscious hero to the same "hypno-chair" that had been used on him, planning to have Captain Marvel join him in his madness. Captain Marvel successfully resisted the hypnotic suggestions. Spy Smasher escaped again.

In the following issue, a fist fight lasted the inevitable two panels, with Spy Smasher flattened by a superhuman punch. Yet he continually managed to escape. The showdown came in issue 18. By now, Spy Smasher was so crazed he was willing to kill his own fiancee, Eve Corby, because she supported the government. Captain Marvel intervened once again, but Eve, biased by her love for Spy Smasher, helped the maddened avenger escape.

The World's Mightiest Mortal was never far behind. He took Spy Smasher back to the "hypno-chair" to reverse the process that had created his mad obsession. But Spy Smasher wished to preserve his state of madness. He destroyed the hypno-chair. For the first time in his life, Captain Marvel was afraid he had failed. Then, summoning up all his will, Captain Marvel used his own hypnotic power on the frenzied aviator. Opening his eyes wide, (he actually showed the pupils instead of the usual plain black dots), Captain Marvel spoke with thundering command: "YOU ARE WAKING UP, SPY SMASHER! WAKING UP! RETURNING TO YOUR TRUE SELF! FORGETTING YOUR EVIL WAYS! FIGHTING BACK TO WHAT YOU WERE!"



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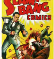
It worked!

His few dozen murders and acts of sabotage were forgiven. Spy Smasher and Eve stood in the sunset looking after Captain Marvel. "What a guy—" the restored hero said. "The greatest man in the world!" Eve stroked her chin. "I'll admit Captain Marvel is wonderful —but you're still tops in my book!"

Spy Smasher went back to the business of smashing spies. He wrecked the notorious band of neo-Nazi Yellow Shirts beginning in *Whiz* 20. Perhaps realizing that he himself was wearing a "brown shirt", one symbol of Nazism, he changed the color of his costume to bright green in *Whiz* 25, December 1941. His chest emblem changed to red to match his cloak. There was no reason given in the story; the uniform was certainly super-heroic, but somehow less appropriate than the army-like garb. An editorial decision had been made to brighten up the strip. Since most of the Fawcett "long underwear" characters were predominantly red, this one took on a green hue. The Green Hornet and Green Lantern had proven the color could be as eminently successful as red or yellow costumed heroes.



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Just before his uniform was changed from the original khaki, Spy Smasher crashed into his own magazine which began in 1941. The handsome cover was printed in a metallic silver ink which made it look like an especially valuable collector's item to a small boy. Inside, there was no origin re-cap that distinguished many other comic character first issues. Instead, Spy Smasher fought The Dark Angel, a sexy villainess; a sinister, bearded spy named Vikrara; and a tribe of misguided Indians going on the warpath through Nazi subversion.

In *Spy Smasher* 7, the enemy of espionage fought The Golden Wasp, a kind of Green Hornet gone wrong. In *America's Greatest Comics* 1 and *Whiz* 25, he battled another memorable adversary, his direct opposite, America-Smasher, a chubby little villain who wore a spiked mail glove.

SLAM-BANG COMICS
10¢
Featuring JUNGLE KING and Eric, The Talking Lion

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Spy Smasher's position at Fawcett was roughly equivalent to Batman's at National. To begin with, they both had no superhuman physical powers, only normal athletic ability and quick wits. Both were inspired by similar sources. Batman owed thanks to the mysterious cloaked phantoms of pulp fiction (notably The Shadow), while Spy Smasher was part of the tradition of aviation fiction. His ancestors were G-8, the flying master spy of the pulps, and radio's Captain Midnight, already two years old when Spy Smasher began in 1940.

Further similarities may be drawn by the fact that both strips made their way into the movies. Republic's 1942 serial version of Spy Smasher starred Kane Richmond as a perfect look-alike for Alan Armstrong.

Both characters, of course, were members of the handsome, wealthy, young, man-about-town club that supplied us with so many comic crime-crushers. But Spy Smasher had no kid sidekick (few Fawcett characters did), a fact that didn't help his longevity. Where Batman had his sleek Batmobile, Spy Smasher went him one better with the Gyrosub. Neither carried a gun.

SLAM-BANG COMICS
10¢

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Their principle difference lay in the fact that Batman was a straight anti-crime character. Spy Smasher, however, was a patriotic hero inseparably tied into the war effort, and thus embodied the built-in liability that would someday kill him off—the end of WW2.

Another factor that contributed to Spy Smasher's eventual downfall was the strong competition—from, of all places, Fawcett itself. That competition appeared full blown in his own magazine, September 1942—CAPTAIN MIDNIGHT.

The stories and artwork in *Captain Midnight Comics* were no better than those in *Spy Smasher*, possibly worse. Yet the character was promoted by a daily radio show, a newspaper strip, and a new movie serial. Moreover, there was just that certain spark in the concept of the name and character of Captain Midnight that could survive vast quantities of inept handling.

The first issue of *Captain Midnight* showed Captain Marvel (half a head taller and fifty pounds heavier) introducing the newcomer who wore a costume of the same red as Captain Marvel's, "Meet Captain Midnight, greatest ace of them all!" Marvel said, one hand on the other captain's shoulder. "Thanks, Captain Marvel!" said the aviator.

MASTER COMICS
SLAM-BANG
10¢
STARRING BULLETMAN!

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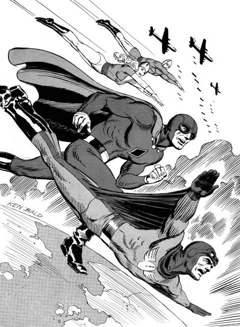
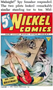
Inside, inventor Captain Albright, who had been Captain Midnight in years past, decided to end his retirement now that his country needed him. His new image was in the super-hero mold; his outfit had a collapsible "glider-chute" that gave him a limited ability to fly, a definite plus for all successful comic heroes of the era.

An interesting cross-over between Captain Midnight and Spy Smasher occurred in *America's Greatest Comics* 8, Summer 1943. This 98-page anthology comic for fifteen cents was Fawcett's answer to National's *World's Finest Comics*. In this issue,


KEN BALD

besides his own individual strip, Spy Smasher guest-starred in the Captain Midnight story. After Japanese agents stole his newly-invented airplane with the "cyclone engine," Captain Midnight used his pocket transmitter to call for help from his Secret Squadron. "Calling S. S.! Captain Midnight calling S. S.!"

Spy Smasher flying in his Gyrosub picked up the message. "Captain Midnight calling me?" Quickly, the phantom flyer answered the call, landing at Midnight's Nevada headquarters. "I've always wanted to meet you, Spy Smasher!" the Secret Squadron leader admitted. "It's an honor to shake your hand, Captain Midnight!" Spy Smasher responded. The two pilots looked remarkably similar standing toe to toe. Midnight's uniform was red where Spy Smasher's was green (both costumes were inspired by The Powermen of Mongo sequence in the Flash Gordon strip). Midnight's nose was arched like an eagle's beak; Spy Smasher's was straight as a wing's leading edge.



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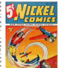
The confusion was rapidly cleared up. The "S.S." Captain Midnight had been referring to was his own Secret Squadron, not Spy Smasher. (Midnight was lucky he didn't bring down Hitler's elite S.S. troops on him.) As long as he was there, Spy Smasher might as well help. As it turned out, Spy Smasher was not of much assistance. The Gyrosub was almost, but not quite, as fast as Captain Midnight's stolen plane, but by taking a shorter route over the poles they were able to overtake it. On the ground, Captain Midnight saved Spy Smasher time after time, by use of his glider-chute, his blackout bombs, and his belt knife.

"Hmm! Mighty handy little invention, that belt knife!" Spy Smasher mused wistfully. It almost seemed that he coveted Captain Midnight's gadgets for his own use. But then, if he had had those gadgets, he would have been Captain Midnight, not Spy Smasher. Finally, Midnight handled the capture of the plane thieves alone. The story seemed to prove who was top ace at Fawcett once and for all.


5¢
NICKEL COMICS
NEW ISSUE EVERY OTHER FRIDAY
BULLETMAN!

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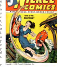
Spy Smasher's own magazine was dropped with issue 11, February 1943. He continued in *Whiz* for some time, but after the war, he put away his colorful uniform and became a private detective in civies, styling himself CRIME-SMASHER. The feature was totally undistinguished, although it did make it into its own title briefly.

Like most Fawcett stars, Spy Smasher was featured in the giant comics, *Gift*, *Xmas*, and *Holiday*, several premium giveaways, and his own Dime Action Book in 1941.

A number of top artists made Spy Smasher one of Fawcett's best drawn strips. They included Charlie Sultan, Ken Bald, Jack Binder, and Alex Blum. Carmine Infantino was on hand to ink a stack of the stories while Otto Binder, Bill Woolfolk and others scribed the yarns.



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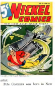
Two other features that debuted along with Captain Marvel in Whiz were GOLDEN ARROW and LANCE O'CASEY. The first was a western hero who used a bow and arrow rather than a six-gun, and the second was a red-haired sailor who charted a course for adventure on his own ship. Neither had any specific origin probably because there was little original about either feature, but they proved popular enough to earn their own individual comic titles.

Roger Parsons had been named The Golden Arrow because of his uncanny skill with his chosen weapon, and, of course, the fact that his quiver held a few dozen gilded shafts—each of which would bring down an evildoer. The Robin Hood of the West rode his horse, Whitewind, through 154 issues of *Whiz*, 6 of his own books, and, in a scattering of other titles like *Xmas*, and *Gift*. Artists Greg Duncan and Pete Costanza drew a bead on Bill Parker's early bullseye scripts.

The strip is particularly notable because it marked Costanza's debut in the comic world. Like Eisner and Binder, he functioned as a comic shop foreman in addition to turning out many strips of his own as an artist.


5¢
NICKEL COMICS
NEW ISSUE EVERY OTHER FRIDAY
BULLETMAN

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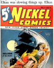
Pete Costanza was born in New York City in 1913, and spent his early life in Bayonne, New Jersey. By the time he was 15 years old, he had enrolled in the Art Student's League, where he learned anatomy and composition from the famed artist-author George Bridgeman. He later studied under Harvey Dunn and was influenced by illustrators like Matt Clark and Frank Hoffman.

At 19, Costanza was drawing for the pulps which brought him into contact with the Fawcett organization. He was recruited for the second issue of *Whiz*, where he replaced Greg Duncan who started the strip. In addition, Costanza collaborated on Ibis and Spy Smasher with Beck. Costanza's work as a pulp illustrator lent itself well to the subject matter and outdoor settings of the Golden Arrow series. He also produced the Jungle Twins for *Nickle Comics* before teaming with Beck on Captain Marvel in 1940.

He acted as unofficial editor for the early *Nickel Comics* with Max Elkan as his assistant. When asked by Al Allard how the book was progressing, Costanza confessed that Elkan was slowing things up. Elkan was subsequently discharged and switched to Quality Publications.


5¢
NICKEL COMICS
NEW ISSUE EVERY OTHER FRIDAY
BULLETMAN

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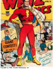
Costanza left the budding comic business for a 10-month term in the service, until he received a medical discharge for high-blood pressure. "When I returned," Costanza related, "I joined forces with Beck who had been freelancing on Captain Marvel and others in his New York City offices. At this time, Wendell Crowley was also with us, editing and creating story lines.

"In 1945, we opened a studio in Englewood, New Jersey where I worked in partnership with Beck who remained centered in the city. In 1947, the tempo of the business had changed, leaving Beck and myself as the sole artists of Captain Marvel until the Superman suit closed us down in 1953."

Afterward, Costanza lent his talents to Classics Illustrated, The American Comics Group, and National's Jimmy Olsen series, before poor health forced him to retire from the comic business.



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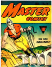
Bob Kingett's Lance O'Casey was Fawcett's seagoing soldier of fortune, a modern day swashbuckler whose salty adventures inevitably led him to pirate coves, ship's graveyards, and lost treasures. An early sidekick, Cap'n Dan was replaced by a younger partner, Mike. The scarlet-haired South Sea mariner and his schooner "The Starfish" were cast in the same mold as later films like His Majesty O'Keefe and South Sea Woman.

Like O'Casey, Kingett was also a crack seafarer. Shortly after he originated the strip, he quit Fawcett and took his own sailboat to the Caribbean. Kingett's uninhibited cruising was cut short when he joined up with the 101st Airbourne who fought in the Battle of The Bulge. Harry Anderson piloted the O'Casey strip for many of its remaining voyages.

The final two strips featured in the opening issue of *Whiz* spotlighted newsman SCOOP SMITH and ace private eye, DAN DARE. Both were more typical of the type of material seen in the newspapers rather than the comic books, which sensationally exploited the elements of action and fantasy rather than simple melodrama. Both strips were consequently dropped from the schedule.



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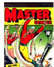
Fawcett's original comics crew, who worked on their earliest books, were drawn from the ranks of their magazine staff. Al Allard, the company's art director, revealed the reason why he had chosen Beck to head the newly organized comic department: "He was a damn good line cartoonist!" Greg Duncan, Bob Kingett and Jess Benton were also part of the original group, all chosen from among the 30 or 40 artists on Fawcett's big staff.

Benton had worked on *Whiz-Bang* and other humor magazines in the 30's. Wendell Crowley remembered him as, "a writer of great ability—he used to do Jimmy Fidler's column from Hollywood." After his comics period, Benton became a court stenographer (a skill he taught himself) and later a teacher of steno-typing.


MASTER COMICS
10¢
HERE COMES BULLETMAN and BULLETGIRL!
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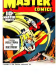
Pete Costanza was the next comics staffer and was followed by Mark Swayze. As the comic line began to expand, assignments were delegated to outside sources. Harry "A" Chesler was one of these sources. He had been one of the first to publish and promote comics in the mid-30's and now approached Fawcett with the idea of selling them some of his own material. Instead, he was given assignments to produce many of the strips in Fawcett comics like *Nickle*, *Master*, and *Slam-Bang*.

Then Beck and Costanza formed their own shop, and were joined by Chic Stone, Dave Berg, Ray Harford, Alex Kostuk (Koster), George Marko, Eddie Robbins, Al McLean, Al Fagely, and others. Almost all the Captain Marvel strips came from the Beck shop.

At the same time, Jack Binder had split from Chesler, organized another shop, and began doing a considerable amount of Fawcett strips. Fawcett still maintained its own staff for several years, which included letterers like Al Jetter, his wife Charlotte, Martin DeMuth, Angelo Grasso, Ben Oda, and Leonard Leone (who began correcting lettering at Fawcett and eventually became vice president and art director at Bantam Books).



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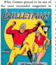
Artists, writers, editors, and production men continually shuffled from one outfit to the next, jockeying for more money, a better position, or just to see what the other side was like. New talent popped up every day; old-timers dropped out just as fast. It would take a chess expert with a computer to figure out who did what at which time and where. No matter. In a way, they were all members of a family—a brotherhood of cartoonists — working day and night to create their own golden age of comics.

*Whiz Comics* proved to be one of the most successful magazines in comic publishing history. It was the only magazine where each of the five major characters in it eventually earned his own independent title, devoted exclusively to his own adventures.


BULLETMAN
No. 1
10¢
64 Pages of Exciting Super-Adventures! Featuring BULLETMAN and BULLETGIRL
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Compared to the speedy success of *Whiz*, almost every other Fawcett comic was left standing at the starting line. For example, *Master Comics*, the title issued a month after the premiere of *Whiz*. It started out with all the earmarks of a loser.

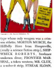
To begin with, it was one of Fawcett's experimental-sized comics, 10 1/2 inches by 14 inches (a size identical to Fiction House's *Jumbo Comics* a few years earlier). The cover layout featured portraits of several characters in a band down the left side of the book (also like *Jumbo*). Across the cover's yellow background, raced MASTER MAN, grasping a damsel in distress in such a conspicuous part of her anatomy that there could be no doubt about why he was smiling.

The opening page of the first story revealed all. "Introducing to the readers of the world's biggest comic book—the world's greatest hero: Master Man! Stronger than untamed horses! Swifter than raging winds! Braver than mighty lions! Wiser than wisdom, kind as Galahad is Master Man, the wonder of the world! As a boy, young Master Man was weak until a wise old doctor gave the youth a magic capsule, full of vitamins, containing every source of energy known to man! The boy becomes the strongest man on earth! Upon the highest mountain peak, he built a lofty castle made of solid rock! From there he sees all evil in the world and races to destroy it instantly!"

The origin, completely lacking in comic charisma, was reinforced by appropriate graphics. Master Man was clad in a loose blue shirt and red leotards. A yellow belt buckle with a big "M" decorated his waist. He wore no mask and had blond, wavy hair. Little else can be said about him, except perhaps to comment on his remarkable resemblance to Superman.

Master Man was drawn by Harry Fiske. A successful cover artist for *Liberty Magazine* in the 20's, his paintings of the drama of WW2 were particularly memorable. In the beginning of the Golden Age, Fiske had worked in the Lloyd Jacquet shop, in addition to turning out pulp illustrations for several publishers including Fawcett. He later helped Edd Ashe and John Jordan on the Don Winslow stories.

Master Man's 7-page origin story was followed by the Kiplingish WHITE RAJAH; THE DEVIL'S DAGGER, a Phantom Detective type whose only weapon was a crimson stiletto; MORTON MURCH, the Hillbilly Hero from Hoopierville, (really a science fiction strip); SHIPWRECK ROBERTS, freelance undersea diver; FRONTIER MARSHAL, a token western; MR. CLUE, a u-solve-it strip; STREAK SLOAN, boy newsreel explorer; EL CARIM, Master of Magic (read his name backwards); and RICK O'SHAY, two-fisted American soldier of fortune. Assembled they formed a 52-page comic, filled with the stand-


BULLETMAN
No. 2
10¢
64 PAGES OF THRILLS AND EXCITEMENT! Featuring BULLETMAN and BULLETGIRL
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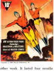
ard assortment of adventurers—each representing an area of thrill fiction so popular in pulps like *Adventure* or *Argosy*.

It took Fawcett editors six issues to realize the experiment in size had failed (*Jumbo's* took seven issues). They had bestowed all their founder's luck on *Whiz Comics*, it seemed, by literally basing the title on their original success, *Captain Billy's Whiz Bang*—Captain Marvel had been Billy Batson in *Whiz* Comics until a *bang* of magic thunder struck! *Master Comics* had none of the Fawcett luck.

Neither did *Slam-Bang*, another Fawcett comic dated March 1940. Gus Ricca's cover featured DIAMOND JACK, whose magical gem gave him extraordinary powers. For some reason, no one bothered to put him into a colorful, skin-tight costume to help sales along. Back-up strips included THE WAR BIRD, a decent action-packed air-war strip; JIM DOLAN, magazine editor; LUCKY LAWTON, a western character; JUNGLE KING, whose almost human lion could speak English; HURRICANE HANSON, sea adventurer; and MARK SWIFT and The Time Retarder, a well-drawn but poorly written time-tunnel idea. All were adequate, but fell far short of real reader-arresting impact. *Slam-Bang* lasted seven issues.

*Nickle Comics* endured slightly longer. It was another offbeat comic, a 32-pager that was published every other week. It lasted four months and was one of Fawcett's most interesting experiments—half a comic book that sold for a nickle. The serialization of stories continued over two-week periods had a definite advantage over those issued once a month. But distributors had to handle twice as many books for the same amount of profit a single ten cent comic brought in, so why bother? It ran eight issues.



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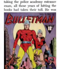
Yet those eight issues were memorable primarily due to the appearance of another superhero who outclassed and outlasted all of Fawcett's second string characters.

It all began in *Nickle* 1 (May 17, 1940), drawn by Jon Small in traditional comic style. Jim Barr's father, a police sergeant, had been gunned down by gangsters, leaving young Jim an orphan dedicated to the war on crime (just like Bruce Wayne, a few years earlier). Jim devoted himself to the study of chemistry, to find a "crime cure," a medicine that would eradicate the poisons that drove men to evil deeds.

By the time Jim got around to taking the police academy entrance exam, all those years of hitting the books had taken their toll. He was a virtual 97-pound weakling. He flunked the police physical. Instead of answering a Charles Atlas ad, he worked out his own system, employing the same chemical he hoped to use for his "crime cure".



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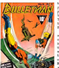
After taking the drug, he awoke the following morning with steel-spring biceps splitting his pajamas. Delighted, he picked up his bed to try out his new strength and kicked the wall hard enough to knock a huge hole in it. He bought new oversized clothes and went to work at the police laboratory where his specialty in ballistics had earned him the nickname "Bullet" Barr. Nobody noticed that he had grown from five eight to around six four, and gained sixty pounds of muscle, but then, nobody had ever bothered to take a second look at him before.

His brain power was also increased by the potion, and he soon perfected a bullet-shaped Gravity Regulator Helmet which gave him the power of flight. He threw together a costume that would "terrify evil doers," consisting of a red polo shirt slit from throat to waist, a yellow kerchief and riding breeches of matching color, a broad leather belt and boots. Yes, "Bullet" Barr had become the arch-enemy of crime—BULLETMAN!



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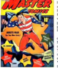
His specialty was not spectacularly original—the bullet-shaped helmet he created had enabled him to fly, and later attracted bullets fired at him, which would bounce harmlessly away. The name and the chrome helmet suggested speed and force. It was that touch that lent enough visual and conceptual appeal for success in those early days of frantic competition.

In his first mission as the Bulletman, he successfully captured a gangster hiding in a supposedly impregnable fortress. The second issue of *Nickle* opened on a copy of *The Trumpet* newspaper which offered a $1,000 reward for a photo of this new Robin Hood. Publisher Stephen Doone was pondering over a photograph of Bulletman in his offices, wondering if it were real and if he should send the money to the police pension fund as requested. Suddenly Bulletman himself flew in the window.

(Bulletman's early stories were told in an unusually primitive style which affected the illustrations and the narrative technique by telling the reader in a caption what he had just seen in the accompanying panel).

Bulletman asked, "Are you going to keep your bargain? I sent you my photo weeks ago, Doone!" The publisher replied, "Bulletman! But—how do I know you're not a fake?" The caption below read: "Confronted with the mighty form of Bulletman, Doone is still suspicious."



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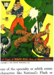
The next panel showed Bulletman seizing the publisher and shooting out far above the streets of the city in a most amazing manner. The caption read: "Amazingly, Bulletman seizes the publisher and shoots out far above the city's streets!" It went on and on, panel by panel, while Bulletman captured a gang of thugs after ripping open a huge bank vault in which they had hidden. Wrenching off a steel flagpole, he batted ringleader Blackmask's plane out of the sky for a home run.

The police chief's daughter, Susan Kent, was already experiencing interest in "Bullet" Barr. By issue 13 she had discovered his identity and joined him in his war on crime as Bulletgirl, one of the first super-female accomplices in comics. In time there would briefly be a Bulletboy (only a friend, not a son) and even a Bulletdog complete with gravity collar. Sound familiar?

Bulletman must be classified as one of the specialty or schtik comic characters like National's Flash or Timely's Human Torch: the superhero with a gimmick. He had originally developed super-powers, as if he had been created as competition for Superman. But as Captain Marvel grew to fill that gap, Bulletman's powers diminished until he was simply a normal human with a gravity helmet.


MINUTE MAN
THE ONE MAN ARMY!
10¢
64 Pages of MINUTE-MAN, Hero of Master Comics

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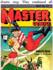
*Nickle Comics* had the same type of undistinguished back-up fillers as *Slam-Bang* and *Master*. They included THE RED GAUCHO and THE JUNGLE TWINS, a take-off of Burrough's Tarzan Twins (cousins of Lord Greystoke). CAPTAIN VENTURE was a Flash Gordon-type space opera story. WARLOCK

THE WIZARD was the most interesting of the group, a fast-paced magic strip with a trunk full of props like a mystical golden hand, an enchanted lamp of the gods, and a talking raven. The tricks were good but, unfortunately, *Nickle's* low sales were no illusion.

While Whiz was prospering, the rest of Fawcett's fledgling line was in trouble. Then the editors took a drastic step. They combined all three titles into *Master Comics*, beginning with issue 8. They reduced it to the standard 64-page size (the price had dropped earlier to ten cents), and retained the best features from *Master*, *Slam-Bang*, and *Nickle*, with Bulletman becoming the lead feature.



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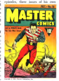
Now Bulletman's career took off with incredible velocity and when he was joined by Bulletgirl, the pair, billed as the Flying Detectives, became a double-barrelled smash on the comic scene. Artists like Mac Raboy and Charlie Sultan helped the high-calibre hero hit the bullseye of success with remarkable accuracy. Others like Jack Binder, Ken Bald, Bob Butts, Vic Dowd, Red Holmdale, Winsor McKay, Jr., Pete Riss, Kurt Schaffenberger, Bill Ward, Clem Weisbecker and dozens more, drew a bead on Bulletman with pencil, pen and brush.

During his career, Bulletman fought some of the most interesting and hideous villains that ever lurked around the Fawcett offices. They included the Black Rat (whose rodent costume would have made him a good, uniquely grim hero in the tradition of the pulp's Black Bat), the Murder Prophet, and the Weeper (all of whom combined to form the Revenge Syndicate); as well as Dr. Mood, the Black Spider, Dr. Riddle, the Fat Fiend, the Headless Horror, and the original Greek monster, the Gorgon.

In 1941, Bulletman scored with his own magazine which ran for 16 issues until the fall of 1946. He guest-starred in a stack of comics including his own Dime Action Book and several miniature comics. Bulletman made his last appearance in *Master* 106, September 1949, after almost ten years of explosive action against the comic crime world.

Briefly, Bulletman had lost the cover spot on *Master Comics* to Fawcett's ultra-patriot, a red, white and blue contender to the title held by the golden age Captain America. He debuted in *Master* 11 drawn by Chesler shop artist Charlie Sultan. Just as Captain America's alter ego was serving in the U.S. Army during his wartime adventures, so too was Private Jack Weston. Yet when spies and saboteurs theatened, he became the star-spangled avenger known as MINUTE-MAN—the one man army!

His flag-inspired outfit consisted of red tights and a red and white striped shirt with sleeves dotted with white stars on a field of blue. Like most of the Fawcett heroes, Minute-Man appeared without a mask to protect his identity (those with no masks generally did better than heroes with masks in the long run). The usual derring-do kept the patriotic pin-up busy for 39 *Master* episodes, three issues of his own book, and numerous appearances in a host of other Fawcett comics.



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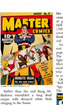
After Sultan's opening tales, Minute-Man was drawn primarily by Phil Bard with Clem Weisbecker inking many of the strips. Both were WPA artists of considerable talent, who later died tragically.

One of his more interesting tales was spun in *America's Greatest Comics* 1, 1941. Minute-Man posed with Captain Marvel, Spy Smasher, Bulletman, and Mr. Scarlet on the cover, and starred inside in his own story drawn by Phil Bard.

The strip introduced Mr. Skeleton, a memorably gruesome villain inspired by Captain America's Red Skull. Mr. Skeleton's skull was not red, but white (obviously, it would not do to call him Red Skeleton).



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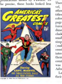
Rather than the real thing, Mr. Skeleton resembled a long dead corpse with decayed white flesh clinging to the bones.

Mr. Skeleton was a giant, huge and powerful enough to pick up a man like a toy. He was a blindly evil force, out to destroy America for his own mad reasons. In the ensuing tale, Minute-Man rushed to rescue top Army brass kidnapped by the monster. The caption read: "As fast as he is, Minute-Man is still too late! Mr. Skeleton's work has already been done, and only grinning skeletons remain where once hung important military officials!"

Minute-Man raised his fists to the heavens and vowed, "We'll meet again, Mr. Skeleton! And when we do, Minute-Man will avenge the deaths of these men!" When they did meet again in mortal combat, Minute-Man grabbed the skeletal giant by the leg and swung him around and around, finally letting him go to literally smash into a thousand bony pieces! One of the Army officers watching commented, "Brrr—What a man! Only a one man army could've done that!"

Minute-Man was the subject of one of the four Big Little Book-type publications issued by Fawcett. To be precise, these books looked less like the Whitman editions that became the generic term for this type of publication, and more like the Dell Fast Action Books, fairly thin (192 pages) and with soft paper covers. (Most regular Big Little Books had hard cardboard covers and up to twice as many pages.)



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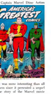
Inside, every page of fiction in text form was faced by one full page black and white illustration. The Minute-Man story told of his fight against the spy villainess, Illyria, one of those deliciously evil creatures, like Batman's Catwoman, who heroes always seemed reluctant to see go to the gallows.

Other books in the series included "Bulletman vs. Mr. Murder" and "Spy Smasher and the Red Death." The Captain Marvel Dime Action Book was more interesting than all of them since it presented a sequel to the story of the Marvel movie serial, resurrecting The Scorpion for his only appearance in the Fawcett pages.



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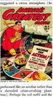
These Dime Action Books were still another type of experimental format that Fawcett issued in addition to its regular size comic books. There were also several different series of miniature comic books, about 3 inches by 4 inches in size. There were editions of Captain Marvel, Spy Smasher, Bulletman and others, all reprints from newsstand titles in black and white, with three-color covers. Some featured interior pages toned with red. These miniatures were sold in various ways in dime stores. Sometimes one was included with a bag of candy and small toys; at other times they could simply be bought two for a nickle (making them the lowest-priced new comics of all). Fawcett made an interesting use of them by fastening them to the covers of their regular comics as a special bonus gift, as was the case with *Captain Marvel Adventures* 23.

Late in 1940, Fawcett launched their only other successful anthology magazine, *Wow Comics*. To get the new title off the ground, Fawcett ran all the unpublished inventory strips left over from their discontinued magazines. Back came Jim Dolan, Rick O'Shay, Shipwreck Roberts (a character destined to sink in the sea of obscurity), and the rest.

*Wow's* only redeeming strip was a new lead-off feature which starred a red-clad reformer known as MR. SCARLET. The initial story, written by Ed Herron and drawn by Jack Kirby, appeared to be a precipitous exercise to strips like Manhunter and The Guardian which would soon follow.

In Mr. Scarlet, Kirby played the hero as a sinister, frightening figure like The Shadow. But the Scarlet costume was hardly ideal since it suggested a circus atmosphere (he performed like an acrobat rather than a shrouded crime-crushing phantom). Perhaps the red outfit and the mustache were meant to present a satanic image, but with the exception of a few panels, failed to come off as such.



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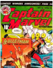
The story told how special prosecutor Brian Butler became the night-prowling Mr. Scarlet who brought justice to "those who escape the law through its legal loopholes!" Mr. Scarlet not only had to worry about getting killed by crooks, or being captured by police, but about being disbarred if exposed. There was no specific origin—the crimson cavalier had already been in business long enough to have become a legend with the first story.

On the opening page, Butler assured his secretary, Miss Wade, that the killer of councilman Donnelli would be brought to justice within seventy-two hours. Later, in the blood-red hood and tights of Mr. Scarlet, the prosecutor caught a small-time crook and jammed a .45 automatic pulled from his yellow belt and holster, in the torpedo's face. "Start singing, Rocco," Mr. Scarlet said. "I've about as much time to waste as you did when you murdered Donnelli." The crook gasped. "Yer crazy! I had nuttin' ta do wit dat bump off!"



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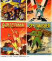
"The eyes behind the red hood glare coldly at Rocco—there's no mercy in those unemotional, steel gray eyes—nothing but death! Wide eyed, Rocco watches the scarlet finger draw tighter on the trigger! He shudders as imaginary steel slugs tear through the tortured brain!" Then, "Don't! Don't shoot! What d'ya wanna know? I'll talk—I'll tell ya anything—anything, but don't shoot.

With the information from Rocco, Mr. Scarlet found the Mike Shannon gang and took them on in a typical slam-bang Kirby donnybrook, his style cramped by the small panels (9 to a page) which were traditional in early comics. Later, as Butler, he exposed the mastermind behind the Donnelli murder as politician Warren Crane. It was a good first story for seven pages, but then Batman began with only six. In a way, Mr. Scarlet might be classified as Fawcett's answer to Batman.

After Kirby, the series continued with a gang of Binder shop artists squiring the man in red and his boy side-kick, Pinky (*Wow* 4) through eight years of comic calamities. While he never earned his own magazine, Mr. Scarlet appeared in several stories per book until issue 69, in the fall of 1948.



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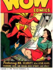
The unsuccessful second features like Shipwreck Roberts were quickly dropped and *Wow* showcased new characters. One of them carried the rich-young-rakehell-turned-crimefighter idea to its ultimate end. "Allan Lanier, son of a wealthy family, has long sought a way to fight crime and its instigators! Hitting upon a plan that an ugly, dwarfed menace should strike sheer horror into the hearts of bad men, Lanier becomes the terrible HUNCHBACK, spine-chilling figure of the night!"

The handsome, blond Allan climbed into a hump and some old green clothes to become a grotesque, lumbering freak of a traumatized crimefighter that could have come right out of a Peter Lorre movie. His four-issue run was memorable, but like Dynamic's Black Dwarf, readers just couldn't identify with the strip. A bizarre study of comic psychopathology, The Hunchback could only have been inspired by the weird crime pulps of that era.

The pseudo-Quasimodo went around thrashing crooks with his fists or with a gnarled crutch which he used like a club. In one tale, he caught up with a gang leader who was revealed as a corrupt district attorney. "Listen, you unspeakable cur—the people elected you—they entrusted their law enforcement to you—and you repay them by joining forces with a lot of killing gangsters! No punishment is severe enough for you!"


WOW
COMICS
10¢
Featuring MR. SCARLET! Also ATOM BLAKE, DIAMOND JACK, JIM DOLAN, RICK O'SHAY, and others!
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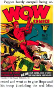
Without hesitation, the Hunchback strangled the DA to death. When the police arrived, they found the corpse and a note from the Hunchback explaining everything. Misty-eyed, one policeman looked after the twisted figure hobbling down the street. The officer said softly, "There he goes! Hunchback! The greatest of us all!"

One of the last of the Fawcett characters to classify as super hero material, premiered in *Captain Marvel* 35, May 1944. His first appearance was, to say the least, rather unusual for a comic hero. He showed up—in drag.

He had the further distinction of being introduced by Bob Hope, pictured as doing one of his famous USO shows for soldiers. Hope announced Miss Dorothy Lamour, but Private Pep Pepper emerged from behind the curtain in a potato sack sarong, with a floor mop for a wig.

Pepper barely escaped being arrested and went on to give Hope and his troop (including the real Miss Lamour) a show they could watch for a change. His acrobatics and magic tricks impressed Billy Batson who reciprocated as Captain Marvel by saving Pepper from a plunge from a trapeze.



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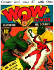
Captain Marvel stayed around to put on a boxing demonstration with the talented private, only to find to his astonishment that Pepper was able to dodge every one of his mighty punches. Suddenly Pepper turned and knocked out the referee, Major Stuff. Why? Because Pepper knew the major was a fake, a Nazi spy. How? Because he had read the spy's mind!

Pepper went on: "I come from a line of circus folk," he revealed. "My father owned his own show. He was a strong man and an acrobat, and my mother was a mind-reader. Guess I just inherited it!"

Sensing the value of Pep Pepper's talents, Captain Marvel arranged a meeting with a certain distinguished group in a darkened room. That group consisted of Franklin, Winston, Joe and Kai-Shek. The spokesman, Franklin, said, "We believe an international police force will be necessary to maintain the peace! The work will be dangerous! You'll have no official backing, but if you accept, speak only the name that shall henceforth be yours—RADAR!" Needless to say, Pep Pepper spoke his new name.

*Master Comics*, issue 50, recapped Radar's origin tale, and sent him off on his first mission to rout the Nazis out of South America. Radar's costume consisted of a reversible raincoat which was popular in the forties and a green felt hat. As Radar, he wore the white side outside, but when in disguise, whether he was indoors or out, he turned the coat inside out and wore the green plaid side outside. Unfortunately, Radar's attempts at keeping world peace were not much more successful than his disguise. He continued in *Master Comics* until issue 87, with Otto Binder writing and Al Carreno drawing many of his stories. Radar made only one issue of his own magazine, a one-shot titled *Comics Novel*.


WOW COMICS
FEATURING MR. SCARLET
10¢
MR. SCARLET smashes through, defying the MIGHTY RAY GUN

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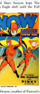
Another engaging experiment by Fawcett, *Comics Novel* featured a number of innovations. The plain orange cover was designed to look like a hard-bound book. The five-chapter story began on the inside front cover and ran with no ads 51 pages to end on the back cover. It pitted Radar against Anarcho and his men: Lord Craven, Dr. Fu Tong, Erik Hevling, and El Diablo. In a well-written thriller (though the art was rather dull), the protagonists traveled from America to Norway, South America, Germany, Tibet, and Nassau. The tale climaxed as Radar tossed Anarcho into a lime pit in the second panel from the end.

The most interesting facet of Radar's spy-crushing career has never been told, though it parallels a scene in his initial appearance. The real story began in late 1943 at the chambers of the OWI, the Office of War Information. Five men sat around a table discussing a new project—a comic strip created solely for propaganda purposes—Operation Radar. The men included Will Lieberson and Otto Binder from Fawcett, and three distinguished American writers, Paul Gallico, Rex Stout, and Clifton Fadiman. Together, they had conceived the character of Radar, one of the few comic heroes able to lay claim to such an imposing origin.

In July 1942, *Wow Comics* had added two mildly successful wartime adventure strips to their lineup. COMMANDO YANK was a kind of Captain America in baggy-pants fatigues with a blue hood and a star on his chest. Somehow the series lasted six years under artists like Weisbecker (who designed Yank's costume), Dan Barry, and Carl Pfeufer.

THE PHANTOM EAGLE was the flying equivalent of the Commando Yank. The Eagle, in reality young Mickey Malone, a mechanic at an English air base, was considered too young to be a pilot. Being an extremely good mechanic, he built his own fighter plane from spare parts (such a thing has been done in real life) and took to the air to secretly battle the Axis. In later years, he picked up a flight of international Dead End Kids called the Phoenix Squadron. They disappeared after the war like the proverbial Phoenix, while the Eagle devoted his efforts to locating the legendary Golden Chalice which bore a formula for peace. Needless to say, he never found it. Bert Whitman and Marc Swayze kept The Phantom Eagle aloft until the Fall of 1948.



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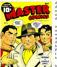
Mark Swayze, another of Fawcett's long-term artists, was born in Monroe, Louisiana and grew up admiring the work of popular illustrators like Bradshaw Crandall, Harvey Dunn, and Matt Clark. He went to Louisiana State University, and before he graduated from Louisiana Tech where he received his Bachelor's Degree in 1939, Swayze began his career in comic storytelling.

He had landed a job as assistant to Russell Keaton on the syndicated aviation strip, Flyin' Jenny. Swayze learned the tricks of the trade from Keaton, and was kept busy primarily with lettering and sometimes inking the daily and Sunday strips. Then, in 1940, he decided to strike out on his own.


CAPTAIN MARVEL JR.
10¢
MASTER COMICS
PYRRA the JUNGLE GIRL!
CAPT. MARVEL AND CAPT. MARVEL JR.
INTRODUCE RADAR - THE INTERNATIONAL POLICEMAN

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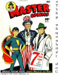
"I joined the staff of Fawcett Publications with an eye toward a career in illustration and writing. France E. (Eddie) Herron was comics editor at the time. Al Allard was Art Director and the art staff numbered about 25 or 30, many of whom were layout artists for magazines other than comics. Clarence Beck and Pete Costanza were there at the time. Pete had been producing Golden Arrow and Prince Ibis. Beck, Pete and I got out Captain Marvel until Chic Stone and Ray Harford came along and joined us. Angelo Grasso was our letterer. Mac Raboy was just starting Captain Marvel Jr. as a staff project.

"Shortly after I joined Fawcett's staff, Herron left and Rod Reed came in as comics editor. Rod was a great friend of mine, and of just about anyone he has ever come in contact with. He had been with the New York Times as theater editor or something as preposterous as that, later became New York editor of *Downbeat*, the magazine for musicians.

"Rod and I formed a softball team among the Fawcett gang and proceeded to beat the pants off the Binder crowd at will—except when they cheated, which they did consistently. As a matter of fact, Wendell, who was with the Jack Binder shop at the time, and Charley Tomsey almost warped my whole personality with their crooked ways on the diamond.



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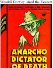
"Beck and I were the only Fawcett artists who could write stories, and both of us threw in a tale every once in a while in an emergency. Around that time I did the original drawings for the character Mary Marvel, which was approved by the Fawcetts and their staff. I believe I did her first story before it was turned over to other artists.

"When I joined the Armed Services I continued the writing of Marvel stories, but under G. I. conditions, of course, art was impossible. Wendell Crowley joined the Fawcett comics editorial staff during that period and I probably would have had many, many rejections had not my contributions been exposed to one so talented in recognizing pure genius.



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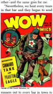
"I returned to New York City after being discharged from the Army and during a brief period did a number of different titles, all for Fawcett. I was floating around town rather freely and would go in for a story whenever money was getting low and take any title that was available. I am sure I did Ibis at the time, and Mr. Scarlet, and a few others. There was some Mary Marvel work, but I don't believe it was in story form—one-pagers emphasizing the paper shortage, I think.

"Then I moved back to Louisiana with a contract with Bell Syndicate for the Flyin' Jenny strip and an agreement with Ralph Daigh at Fawcett to supply all Phantom Eagle art and as much of the writing as I had time for. Later Will Lieberson, then comics editor at Fawcett, asked if I would switch to romances and I agreed, and did reams of them.

"A strange phenomenon occurred after Fawcett stopped publishing comics in '53. I was in Derby, Connecticut doing some editorial work for Charlton Publications and preparing a new feature for Bell when Charlton decided to build a strong comics staff. They recruited a number of pros from New York City and the first to show up was Chic Stone, whom I hadn't seen since the Fawcett days.

"Naturally Chic and I began to celebrate seeing each other after so long a time—and the logical place was in a local tavern. All taverns in that area had those table-top shuffleboard games for their customers, and Chic and I began to play. Chic swore that he had never been more than passable at that game or any other—and the same goes for me.

"Nevertheless, we beat every team in that bar and they began to send runners out to every bar in town to bring in their best teams. Before morning we had beaten everyone in town! The custom was that after each game the losing team bought the drinks, this was accomplished under the influence of alcohol—me slightly, Chic outrageously."


WOW COMICS
No. 6
10¢
STARRING
COMMANDO YANK AND PHANTOM EAGLE

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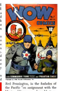
When the comic industry toppled in the mid-50's, Swayze, like so many other comic artists, decided to earn a living by applying his talents to advertising and promotional work. He regarded his Fawcett period and its people with much affection.

To cater to the interest in the war, Fawcett leased the rights to that famous member of the Armed Forces, DON WINSLOW OF THE NAVY. The sailor was already famed from a series of juvenile novels, Big Little Books, a daily radio show, a movie serial, and a newspaper strip. Fawcett did not reprint the daily and Sunday strips (other publishers had earlier), but presented new episodes for an entire Don Winslow magazine, many drawn by Ed Ashe and Carl Pfeufer.

Some of the comic book stories followed the established pattern by having Winslow battle his ever-escaping nemesis, the Scorpion. Others had Don and his sidekick, Red Pennington, in the foxholes of the Pacific "on assignment with the Marines." It was an unbearably tame "soldier" comic, with Don and Red not even as rough with the Japanese as the Hunchback was with the crooked D.A.


WOW COMICS
with COMMANDO YANK and PHANTOM EAGLE

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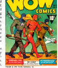
Many of the Winslow tales were scripted by ace pulp writer Joe Millard. He also contributed quite a few text stories which ran in the comics.

An oddity at Fawcett was the fact that artists and writers of the big features that sold the magazines almost never got any by-lines or signature credits, except C. C. Beck who got a masthead nod as chief artist, a kind of executive post. But by-lines were given atop the short stories which were included in the mags only to assure second-class postage rates. Two pages of printed material qualified them as magazines.

These paid $15 each for several years until Joe Millard wrote a series so good that Ralph Daigh, editorial director, said, "He should get more for these. We'll pay him $25." Then he decided to make $25 standard for everybody.

Joe was fast. One afternoon he sat down and wrote 13 of them. Next morning, he took them into one editor who bought 12 and turned down the other. Joe walked over to another editor two desks away and sold the 13th.



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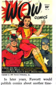
The *Don Winslow* comics seemed to reflect Fawcett's justifiable doubts about creating socko successful characters on their own. Spy Smasher, Bulletman, Minute-Man, Ibis, and Golden Arrow all had their own titles briefly, but ultimately went under. Far more successful were the leased, previously established characters like Captain Midnight, Don Winslow and Nyoka the Jungle Girl.

By the 50's, Fawcett's line was dominated by a corralful of movie cowboys. They had briefly published a well-illustrated Gene Autry comic before Dell picked up the rights to it. An early Buck Jones feature was credited as being "written and acted" by the western star himself. The strip was dropped after Jones' tragic death (although Dell would publish comic books about this great Western star a decade later). He was replaced by HOPALONG CASSIDY, Clarence E. Mulford's famous fictional character, played by William Boyd on the screen (and who later was given a "starring William Boyd" credit even in the comics).



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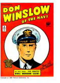
In later years, Fawcett would publish comics about another timeless, unforgetable Western hero, TOM MIX. Besides starring in his own magazine, Mix appeared in *Master Comics*, *Wow Comics*, *Real Western Hero*, and *Six Gun Heroes*, all monthlies, as well as reprints in *Xmas Comics*, to be one of the most widely published features of any kind in the comics. Cover photographs were from the Mix films and the drawings inside (pencilled by Carl Pfeufer, inked by John Jordan) were based on the real Tom Mix. The scripts were adaptations which utilized the radio setting of the TM Bar Ranch and its characters, Wash, Doc Greene, and Sheriff Mike Shaw.

Besides Tom Mix, Fawcett also offered individual comic books of ROCKY LANE, TEX RITTER, LASH LARUE, ROD CAMERON, GABBY HAYES, SMILEY BURNETTE, BILL BOYD (under his own name, as well as the Hopalong Cassidy series), and briefly, BOB STEELE and KEN MAYNARD. They all had a certain identical format and quality which generated considerable appeal to readers of the proper age.

Other comics were issued as the trends demanded—sports books, funny animal, war, weird mystery, and many notable movie adaptations (many done by Otto Binder who confessed he almost tore his hair out squeezing a two-hour film into 52 pages until he learned the secret of finding key scenes and eliminating minor characters).


DON WINSLOW OF THE NAVY
10¢
IN THIS ISSUE! THE GHASTLY DOLL MURDER CASE!

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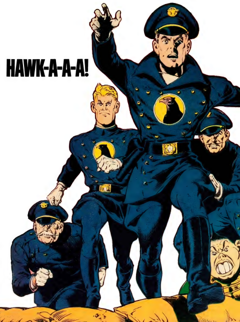
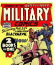
When the entertainment value of all super heroes began to diminish, Fawcett sales dropped. In the late 40's and early 50's, they lacked a real eye-popping masterpiece. Though they developed new titles, it seemed as though their comic staff and the outside shops with which they worked, had laced themselves into a straitjacket of formula thinking and production. The necessary reformulation to conquer the tenacious 50's never materialized.

When Fawcett agreed to stop issuing Captain Marvel, the decision was made to suspend all other comic publications. In early 1954, Fawcett relinquished their position as one of the top comics producers in history. With the trunk of their comic tree (Captain Marvel) gone, perhaps they realized the remaining branches would eventually wither and die.

In the January 1954 issue of the *Marvel Family*, the remaining Whiz Kids took their final bow. Spy Smasher was long gone. Ibis, Golden Arrow and Lance O'Casey had all vanished from the comic horizon. The lightning was over. The thunder subsided.

The magic was gone.


HAWK-A-A-A!


STORIES OF THE ARMY AND NAVY
MILITARY
COMICS
AUGUST No. 1
Starring that new sensation BLACKHAWK
New!
2 BOOKS in ONE!
10¢

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In 1941, comic readers paused and looked to the heavens. From the far horizon came the distant growing throb of engines, soft-edged, full, pulsing. Suddenly, the skies thundered as a squadron of Grumman F5F's blotted out the sun.

THE BLACKHAWKS were here.

"The greedy grasp of tyranny is upon Europe, and ramparts of evil challenge the free-born peoples of the world to dispute Nazi cruelty if they dare! And there are those who dare, who never refused a dare yet! Messengers of destruction to all evil and injustice – The Blackhawks!" Their coming was a cardinal event in the history of comics.

Superman, Batman, Captain America and The Human Torch had since become the super-patterns by which a teeming profusion of super-imitations had been manufactured. They were all essentially comic book matter. Not so with The Blackhawks who had a firm basis in reality. Their patterns could be found in the history books. Or on the front pages of newspapers all over the world.

Those patterns had names like William Barker, Eddie Rickenbacker, Bill Bishop, Werner Voss, Frank Luke, Raoul Lufbery, or Manfred Von Richthofen. Or perhaps Jimmy Doolittle, Claire Chennault, Bob Johnson, Greg Boyington, Erich Hartmann, Douglas Bader, Saburo Sakai, or Francis Gabreski.

Each of them represented a new breed of fighting man in a new kind of combat, a 20th century knight, a super soldier—a flying hero. They were the leading aces who piloted their war birds across the scarlet cloudscapes of two world wars. Each was a real-life player in the grim game where the victor won supremacy of the skies.

They were the patterns for The Blackhawks.

The Blackhawks—whose hunting ground was the savage sky over Europe just as it had been for their historic counterparts. Where once airmen climbed into the dawn on wings of wood and wire, they now piloted machines of aluminum and steel. Massive dogfights pitted Junkers and Messerschmitts against Spitfires and Hurricanes. Heinkel and Dornier bombers were matched against Avro Lancasters and Flying Fortresses. Jap Zeros and Nazi Focke-Wulfs faced Mustangs, P-40's, Corsairs, and Lockheed Lightnings.

The warring skies ran red.

And against the crimson drama, The Blackhawks took flight. They logged their first mission in August 1941. Their story was told in *Military Comics* 1.

"History has proven that whenever liberty is smothered and men lie crushed beneath oppression, there always rises a man to defend the helpless, liberate the enslaved, and crush the tyrant—such a man is Blackhawk! Out of the ruins of Europe and out of the hopeless mass of defeated people he comes—smashing the evil before him. . ."

The splash panel symbolically pictured the figure of Blackhawk stalking through a smoking battlefield tangled with barbed wire and shattered fence posts. "Poland, 1939 . . . The powerful armies of Nazi Germany march on the fast-crumbling city of Warsaw! The remains of the defending Air Force strike valiantly to stem the angry tide which is sweeping over the European continent!"

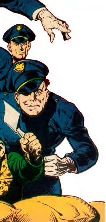
The second page introduced German air ace, Captain Von Tepp. Cruel and monocled, he personified the Nazi image as he pledged to rid the killer skies of the remaining Polish aerial defense. Then he took to the air—his command, the infamous Butcher Squadron. In the ensuing conflict, the Polish fleet all become flaming coffins until, "at last, only one jet black plane remains to combat Von Tepp's Butchers!" (Curiously, it was red and yellow).

After scoring six kills among the attacking Messerschmidts, the elusive airman's plane finally spins earthward, riddled with enemy bullets. He lives through the searing crash and escapes the flaming wreckage only to face a payload of Nazi bombs meant to finish the job. Still he survives and makes his way to his home and family.

Instead, he finds a bombed-out farmhouse and the bodies of his brother and sister. Looking to the angry skies, he swears his vengeance with grim resolution. "You killed them, Von Tepp! Just the same way *as I'll kill you* someday! !"

The survivor's vendetta begins to take shape. "Months pass by, like a huge steamroller, the Nazi war machine crushes all of Europe! Then, one day a new name appears on the horizon—a name that strikes terror in the hearts of men—BLACKHAWK! Like angels of vengeance, Blackhawk and his men swoop down out of nowhere, their guns belching death, and on their lips, the dreaded song of The Blackhawks. . . !"

Blackhawk had recruited a league of pilots whose motives matched his own, and together they relentlessly

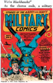


Reed Crandall's first BLACKHAWK cover - from *Military* 13.

searched Europe for the Nazi murderer. The trail ends at a chateau in France where VonTepp plans to shoot a group of hostages before a firing squad. The patriots are lined up against a wall. Trigger fingers tighten. Then . . .

*"Over land, over sea,*
*We fight to make men free,*
*We're Blackhawks!"*

As the chorus ends, a solitary figure dressed in a black military uniform, crosses the courtyard. "Did someone mention my name?" He demands immediate surrender and gestures to the surrounding walls where, "like blackbirds of prey," the Blackhawks stand waiting. Then, all hell breaks loose.


STORIES OF THE ARMY AND NAVY
MILITARY
COMICS
10¢
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The Blackhawks win their first hand-to-hand encounter and free the hostages. Von Tepp, however, is taken prisoner and accompanies his captors to their headquarters on Blackhawk Island. For the slaughter of his family and his countrymen, Blackhawk demands satisfaction and challenges Von Tepp to a duel! The weapons—planes!

Minutes later, the two warhawks again face each other in the sky. Their machines climb, bank and dive as both aces trigger the skies full of leaden death. Suddenly Blackhawk's aircraft falters; Von Tepp had sabotaged it before take-off by loosening a gas valve. Machine guns exploding into a hail of destruction, the enemy ace dives for the kill.

Suddenly the sky is shattered as the planes collide in mid-air!

They crash to earth. Then, a figure emerges from the smoking wreckage. "Ha! Ha! Ha! The swine!!! I, the great Von Tepp, always win!"

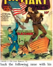
"Not always,"a voice answers from the twisted, shattered debris. Then, like no other comic hero had ever done before, Blackhawk ruthlessly shot his flying foe to death with an automatic, and set the tone for all his subsequent adventures.

In their premiere episode, The Blackhawks were nameless and faceless freedom fighters whose numbers were even vaguer. Only Blackhawk emerged as an individual, the leader of an assault battalion that was apparently more capable on the ground than in the air. Like most characters, they needed time to mature and develop the sure-fire format which would eventually evolve.

The airbourne avengers were formally introduced in the next issue which trimmed them to an even half dozen. Like their leader, they had only a single name. Andre, Stanislaus, Hendrick (Hendrickson in later tales, sometimes Henderson), Boris, Zeg, and Olaf represented their own personal League of Nations. They were juggled, retired, killed, and replaced throughout the years.

ANDRE appeared as the unit's fighting delegate from France—suave, polished, a handsome ladies' man with a hairline moustache and a flashing smile. Eventually he would emerge as Blackhawk's second-in-command and, in many of the early adventures, was the central character around which stories were written. As all the Blackhawks did at one time or another, Andre, too, seemingly gave his life for their cause. But writers always found ways to bring them back into the fold.

The position of Blackhawk's oldest companion was claimed by STANISLAUS, a fellow countryman from Poland. Generally he looked to be about forty years old and had dark close-cropped hair. He functioned mostly as a minor character in the squadron except in *Military* 31 where he sacrificed his life by ramming a zeppelin in a spectacular mid-air collision. You guessed it—he was back the following issue with his eyesight restored by a miracle transplant that used the eyes of a dying dog.



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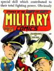
HENDRICK began as a Dutchman but was soon changed to a German, a fighting man who, like many Germans, opposed the Nazi regime and sided with the allies. He sported a head of snow-white hair and a handlebar moustache that gave him the appearance of a fifty year old man. Much later it was revealed that the stocky aviator was an expert marksman and weapons expert. His character and colorful ethnic dialogue made him a favorite with the strip's writers who never missed an opportunity to include him in the verbal action.

Blackhawk had intimated that each of the squadron had some special skill which contributed to their total fighting power. Obviously OLAF'S talent lay in his size and strength. In addition, his huge brawn made an interesting contrast to the German's stout frame. As the Swedish member of the Blackhawks, Olaf neatly rounded out the group's personality.


STORIES OF THE ARMY AND NAVY
MILITARY
COMICS
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BORIS and ZEG, though introduced as a pair of the unit's wingmen, were given only vague and superfluous treatment during the first year's adventures, then were replaced by an American named CHUCK. The series' editors realized, of course, that too many foreigners (especially these two, who were rather indistinctive) spoiled the brew. So, in order to represent the good of' USA, Chuck was created.

Other Blackhawks were seen and heard from in the first few issues: one with an English accent; another was a crewcut teletype operator; a third was Vladim, the aircraft designer who built the Blackhawk's supercharged planes. Those and a few more who were featured inconspicuously in the early stories soon vanished as the legion of pilots settled into a solid format.

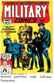
But one member was constant—the mad Chinaman, CHOP-CHOP. Fat, furious, and funny, Chop-Chop, always brandishing a meat cleaver, lived up to his name as he charged battle screaming, "Yippee! Me make hamburger!"

He had come to them in *Military* 3. The story began as The Blackhawks heard a plane approaching their island domain. As they prepared their defense, bits and pieces of the oncoming aircraft showered down upon them until, finally, the whole works crashed at their feet. Blackhawk retrieved its occupant, a diminutive Chinaman who regarded them with an effusive explosion of honorable Chinese curses.

He explained in pidgin English the plight of "Missee Ann" (a nurse whom Blackhawk had rescued in the first issue) and her sanctuary for crippled soldiers. A Nazi force was gathering to destroy the haven. Chop-Chop had pieced together a plane and gone for help.

The Blackhawks, of course, intervened and saved the infirmary from slaughter. Andre, however, had taken a volley of bullets meant for his leader. As his dying gesture, he hurled himself off a cliff to start an avalanche and bury the Nazi invaders.

He returned in *Military* 9 as the Man in The Iron Mask. He had lived through the previous ordeal but was scarred beyond recognition. So Blackhawk recruited the aid of a mad plastic surgeon who gave Andre the face of a Nazi baron before finally doing the job right. In the bargain, Andre got engaged to the deviate Doc's daughter. Who says there are no happy endings? Chop-Chop, of course, stayed with them to become part-time cook, full-time funnyman.



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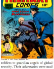
They all lived on Blackhawk Island somewhere in the North Atlantic, where they were ever ready to take up any challenge that came over their wireless. The base was equipped (according to a diagram in the first story) with a harbor, disappearing forts, elevators, lighthouse, signal tower, barracks, airfield, and a revolving zeppelin shed.

During the life of the strip, Blackhawk Island would be moved to various locations which included the Mediterranean and later the Pacific Ocean. Conceptually, the idea of a secret airbase isolated in mid-ocean fit perfectly into the Blackhawk master plan. It was also a great device around which to begin a story—such as visitors, friendly or otherwise, approaching from the skies. Or a shipwrecked victim washed ashore onto the beach. Or an underwater attack by a fantastic submarine and its deadly crew.

The Blackhawks' planes, modified Grumman "Skyrockets" (sometimes drawn with Lockheed P-38 engine canopys), were really extentions of the pilots themselves in precisely the same manner as our relationship with automobiles. Early adventures roared with obligatory dogfight scenes but as the black knight and his wingmen developed personalities, the aspect of air conflict decreased proportionately. Sequences of air battles once needed to guarantee reader satisfaction were replaced with more story and more characterization.

Where the planes had once been co-stars in the strip, they were now relegated to the position of props—important, yes, but nonetheless props. Long before the war ended, the Blackhawks had become international policemen. Where Superman and Batman confined their activities for the most part to Metropolis and Gotham City, The Blackhawks patrolled the planet.

Their role gradually shifted from soldiers to guardian angels of global security. Their adversaries were mad scientists hell-bent on world conquest, super-mechanized raiders, warring dictators of small mythical countries, free-lance pirates and plunderers, or international crime cartels. Their planes became instruments, colorful tools that transported them where they were needed, usually to barren volcanic isles, or hidden mountain retreats, or searching deserts, or tropical jungles. Even to cities under the sea.


STORIES OF THE ARMY AND NAVY
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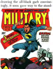
The passing of time revealed The Blackhawks as ground-fighters, not air-fighters. Aerial combat was too limiting plot-wise, especially in a strip as literal as Blackhawk. To make up for it, Blackhawk parachuted into the action whenever possible. And, lest the readers forget the original concept, writers would periodically toss in a tale about a squadron of Bat-Planes or Moth-Planes or Bird-Planes.

In his opening tale, Blackhawk's uniform—a military jacket and jodphurs—was solid black with a minimum of blue highlights. Because of the time and difficulty involved in drawing the all-black garb convincingly, it soon gave way to the standard blue outfit (sometimes purple on the cover). It also lacked the identifying yellow circle with the hawk's head which was first used in the second issue. Instead, a small winged aviator's emblem decorated the jacket just over the heart. A yellow scarf embellished with tiny hawk heads completed the early uniform. During the first year's adventures, The Blackhawks sometimes wore simple black turtlenecks instead of their regulation uniforms.



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Though his origin tale proclaimed Blackhawk to be a Polish soldier (and later an American), all pretense of this fact was dropped from the following stories. Blackhawk never identified with any group by mannerism, speech, or appearance. He owed allegiance to no government or empire, save his own. He put it this way in *Military* 2, "The Blackhawks are the last of the free men of the conquered countries—we fight for the freedom of men rather than for profit or politics!"

In reality, Blackhawk himself was a man without a country.

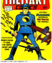
Nowhere in the entire series, except in the soon-forgotten opening issue are we given even the slightest clue as to his background. The questions will remain unanswered forever: What is Blackhawk's real name? How did he become a superpilot? How had he organized the squadron? How could they build such an island? Why was he called Blackhawk?

All mysteries—mysteries which could only be answered by the black knight himself. Readers wondered about the secrets that lay beyond those searching, icy eyes—eyes that had the same cruel glint as those of the fierce, noble hawk's head that symbolized Blackhawk's law and was so much a part of his legend. One can only guess about the story that is concealed behind the man's reckless deeds and ruthless demeanor.

Perhaps, just perhaps, Blackhawk was the son of a European nobleman, a merciless tyrant, a mad ruler whose scripture was suffering and injustice. Would that son spend a lifetime seeking redemption from his conscience? Perhaps, Blackhawk was a criminal, an assassin, a Judas whose betrayals could only be atoned for by wiping out some of the evil he had brought into the world. Perhaps Blackhawk had been a coward, an officer who deserted his command and was responsible for the slaughter of legions. Could his heroics be an act of penance, while waiting for the inevitable end? What was it that Blackhawk was trying to forget by his endless encounters with death? Mysteries—without answers!

Blackhawk himself was the Tyrone Power of comics—dark haired, serious, broodingly handsome. He seldom smiled. And if he did, it was a lethel warning to his enemies. He was no wisecracking punster like the Batman.

No leaping over tall buildings, Blackhawk needed a plane to fly. No baroque Buck Rogers model either; his was authentic. No changing clothes in phone booths. No flashy cape or outlandish tights for Blackhawk. He even scorned the use of special equipment like Batman's utility belt or the Hornet's gas gun. Instead, he carried massive .45 caliber automatics—weapons to get the job done. And best of all, no alter ego nonsense for him. He was Blackhawk to the core and we all knew it.



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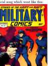
The Blackhawk song was, perhaps, his only social compromise. Even then, it was usually an omen of doom for some poor, deserving villain. At each tale's conclusion, the Blackhawks would sing their way over the end title in a neat, natural cinematic wrap-up. In addition, the songs contributed a cohesive, element to the group's identity and to the series. Artist Tex Blaisdell's brother-in-law, Dick French, wrote the many Blackhawk verses, and the official song which went like this:


STORIES OF THE ARMY AND NAVY
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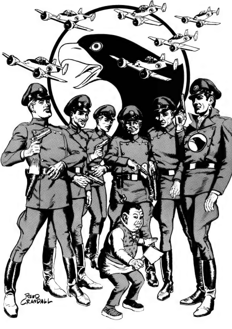
*"Hawkah—We're the Blackhawks,*
*Hawkah—We're on the wing.*
*Over land over sea,*
*We will fight to make men free*
*and to every nation*
*liberty will bring.*
*Hawkah—Follow The Blackhawks,*
*Hawkah—Shatter your chains.*
*Seven fearless men are we,*
*give us death or liberty.*
*We are the Blackhawks,*
*remember our names."*

Blackhawk believed in direct action. He spurned the circus stunts and super-acrobatics of Captain America or Daredevil. A smashing right cross or a kick in the groin was sufficient for most of his adversaries. If not, Blackhawk had other ways, ways to which few of his fellow comic characters ever resorted. He carried a gun and never hesitated to use it, just like any professional soldier.

Whether he knew it or not, Blackhawk had become the personification of all he hated. In costume and concept he summed up the fascist point of view. In the comic world he remains the ultimate right-winger, the pro-militant avenger taking the law into his own hands, complete with an army of enforcers.

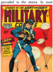
His outfit, replete with Gestapo hat and black boots was, of course, lifted directly from those of the storm troopers and SS men he battled.

There was a difference, however. He was on our side. Where Batman existed in a world created ficticiously around him, Blackhawk abided in the *now*. His success was, in fact, predicated upon it. Blackhawk's


REED CRANDALL

world was real. Writers exercised extreme caution not to violate the concept with flying men or too-super villains. Artists were careful to illustrate the series only in the most literal of terms. Ultra-realism was one of the primary factors for the strip's prosperity.

The other was the strong undercurrent of violence and fatalism that prevailed in the stories. In most series, death and destruction were themes used like leitmotifs threading through tales, designed to punctuate some larger point about the workings of human society. In the Blackhawk stories, those themes were raised to major structural keys. They had the same appeal as the Spillane sagas whose philosophy might easily be sado-masochism makes the world go 'round!



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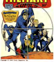
Blackhawk remained ultimately committed to his cause—justice. No easy task considering the voluptuous women that populated the strip. Xanukhara, Red Laura, Cobra, Madame Butterfly, Queen Bee, The Black Tigress, Satana, Fear—all lusted after the avenging angel even though he was their sworn enemy. Nonetheless, they thrust their hips seductively in his direction, inviting him with half-lidded eyes that said yes. Their pitch was always the same: "Join me Blackhawk and together we can rule the world!" Miss Fear made a number of appearances (as an ally of the Blackhawks) in the grand tradition of Milt Caniff's Dragon Lady.

Blackhawk always appeared impeccably chaste, pure and virtuous. But nobody who had a wardrobe of black leather gloves, boots, whips, belts, and straps could be that straight. We all knew he was getting a piece of the action. It could be the reason he stayed in the business so long.

Blackhawk and his messengers of death were natural extentions of pulp pilots like *G-8 And His Battle Aces* and *Dusty Ayres And His Battle Birds*. Films like Hughes' *Hell's Angels* and Wellman's *Wings* contributed much to the form and content of the Blackhawk saga.

"One for all and all for one" was their creed, and their camaraderie was unequaled in the comic chronicle. They were constantly being dismembered, disfigured, going blind, or dying, yet they endured. With the gusto of WW1 pilots, they celebrated their victories by quaffing beer on their island sanctuary. They shared the same fated, masculine loyalty as Cary Grant, Victor McLaglen, and Doug Fairbanks, Jr. had in *Gunga Din*. Or Errol Flynn and David Niven, the pilots of *Dawn Patrol*. They epitomized the "gang" format more than The Justice Society or The All-Winners Squad, whose members generally functioned individually. Conversely, the squadron of Blackhawks worked as one.

They might be compared to pulp star Doc Savage and his men: Monk, Ham, Renny, Long Tom, and Johnny. But the resemblance is only superficial. Doc's associates were men of science, each an expert in his chosen field. The Blackhawks actually had no specialties, no tricks, powers, or gimmicks with which to distinguish themselves. Instead, the Blackhawk cast had strong, distinct personalities which were etched with dialogue characterization. Take this sequence for example:


STORIES OF THE ARMY AND NAVY
MILITARY COMICS
MARCH No. 29
10¢
Blackhawk and The Flying Fool

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Andre (the Frenchman), "En avant! Chuck sprang ze trap! Catch zat prowler!"

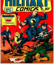
Olaf (the Swede), "They ban brace door shut! Ay can't kick it in, by yupiter!"

Hendrickson (the German), "Out uf der vay, efrybody! Our friend vill open dot door!"

Living in an atmosphere of isolation and rugged discipline, they waited tenaciously for distress alerts on their short-wave radio system. As their leader, Blackhawk allowed himself the indulgent privilege of wearing a scarf in an open-throat jacket and the hawk's head symbol in black and yellow on his chest.

Editors soon made him an American for obvious reasons. His popularity grew with every appearance as he became Quality's premiere personality. His newsstand sales soon joined those of Captain America, The Flash and Batman. His own quarterly, *Blackhawk* 9, was established in the winter of 1944 (it took over where eight issues of *Uncle Sam* left off). With issue 44, November 1945, *Military* was changed to *Modern Comics*. The war was over, but not for the Blackhawks. Columbia Pictures 1952 serial cast Kirk Alyn as the fearless flier in the movies. A short-lived radio series also featured his exploits.

Blackhawk faced a legion of inspired villains like Carnage, Captain Squidd, King Murder, The Scavengers of Doom, The Vulture, Grin the Grabber, Blackbeard, Von Volter the Terrible, Mr. Yesterday, Dr. Omega, The Bat, Captain Harpy, Killer Shark, King Condor, The Fortress of Fiendish and dozens of others. Malevolent as they might have been, his opponents were created with a special kind of mythic charisma surrounding them. Conceptually, they were as consistant as they were interesting.



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The art and writing verified the claim the publisher's logo boasted, it was indeed a quality book. Scripts were written over epic frameworks with genuine cinematic persuasiveness. Continuity was often brilliant, and stories ran on like motion pictures, highly charged with realism, romanticism and unrestrained imagination. The Blackhawk legend was built around tales like the following one from *Blackhawk* 18:

"Anywhere in space—anywhere in time—The Blackhawks battle for justice—even though they are carried back a hundred years to face a cruel and selfish tyrant! The greatest fighting brotherhood of history, drawn from among heroes of all nations, leaves Blackhawk Island to oppose the ruler of The Realm of Yesterday!"

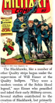
While on patrol, The Blackhawks spot a man floating on a raft of debris in the ocean. They take him back to their island where he feverishly related. "I-I've been in another century! Brutal, horrible treatment—a hundred years in the past!" He continues to tell how he escaped from that vapor-covered isle. Then, the Blackhawks take to the air and locate it.

An eerie vapor cloud forces their planes to land, where they meet the island's master. "Permit me to introduce myself—I am Mr. Yesterday! This island belonged to my great-grandfather, who had the whim to keep all things in the condition and style he loved best! His descendants still do so! And this lady answers to the name of Miss Danger!"

The blue-clad avengers are hauled in irons to Yesterday's castle, but not before the enticing Miss Danger falls for their leader. In her eighteenth century boudoir she muses, "Many women have loved Blackhawk, no doubt! It might be he would be attracted by me!" Her intentions are discovered by Mr. Yesterday, who plans to kill the prisoners. At that moment, the Blackhawks escape, turn off the vapor, and gain control of the castle.

Yesterday attacks with cannons and his pirate crew, only to be defeated. Blackhawk engages him in saber combat and runs him through the heart. "Well, Blackhawk! To the victors belong the spoils!" whispers Miss Danger seductively, hands on hips.

"It's too late!" Blackhawk retaliates and walks away from the woman a la Welles in *Lady From Shanghai*.


STORIES OF THE ARMY AND NAVY
MILITARY COMICS

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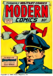
The Blackhawks, like a number of other Quality strips began under the supervision of Will Eisner at the Quality bullpen. "They were a modern version of the Robin Hood legend," says Eisner who pencilled and inked their early *Military* covers. Several staffers contributed to the creation of Blackhawk, but primarily the character sprang from the efforts

◁ Reed Crandall's BLACKHAWKS - 1972

of Charles "Chuck" Cuidera.

Born in New Jersey in 1915, Cuidera had previously worked for Fox Publications until his friend and companion at Pratt Institute, Bob Powell, invited him to join the Eisner shop. Rates were about five to eight dollars for a completely pencilled and inked page. A page or two a day was the average output per artist.



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Heavily influenced by Caniff, it was only natural Cuidera think in that direction. "The Germans had designed such great costumes, we decided to use them ourselves," he revealed. "It was like fighting fire with fire." A year or so earlier, the Nazis had overrun Poland. "How about making Blackhawk a Pole?" suggested Powell, who was of Polish extraction. They agreed–it would keep the strip topical.

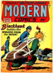
"We made Olaf a strong-jawed Swede, Cuidera told, patterned after *Terry and the Pirates*' Big Stoop. Andre was a kind of French Ronald Coleman. Chop-Chop (or Chops as Blackhawk called him) was a humorous beaver-toothed version of Charlie Chan complete with a pigtail tied atop his head with a red ribbon. Hendrickson (the name used most often) was a stocky Dutchman in the Alan Hale tradition, perhaps fifty years old. The others, including Blackhawk, were about half that age. Stanislaus was named after Powell whose first name was Stanley." Chuck was later named after the strip's creator.

Lifelong airplane buffs, Cuidera and Powell, selected the Grumman F5F, an experimental Navy fighter plane, as the strip's aircraft. "I liked the lines, the twin engines of the Skyrocket," says Cuidera who later became a first lieutenant in the Air Force. The Blackhawks' planes were blue with crimson wings and tail stabilizers (how they must have resisted making them all black). Their symbol, a black hawk's head, was positioned on the fuselage just behind the cockpit (and on the wings in the early stories). Six machine guns projected ominously from the plane's nose between the engines (too bad no toy maker ever envisioned the merchandising potential of those beauties).

Cuidera pencilled, inked and lettered the first eleven issues, then left for the service. Reed Crandall picked up the strip in the middle of the next story and began piloting it toward its zenith. At one point, Blackhawk was outselling everything but Superman. "Crandall," says Cuidera, "was the greatest." It was no exaggeration.

Crandall unquestionably was the finest artistic talent to emerge from the world of comic illustration in the 40's. And quite possibly the 50's and the 60's.

Reed Crandall was born on Washington's birthday, February 22, 1917, in a log cabin on his father's farm in Winslow, Indiana. When he was seven years old, the family moved to Bloomington, Indiana and, after six years, to Newton, Kansas. Drawing came naturally to him and, though he was an outdoorsman, much of his time was spent at a make-shift drawing board. One of his earliest works can probably still be seen in Newton—a wall mural done for the local mortuary. He developed prodigiously and upon graduation from Newton High School, won a National Scholastic Weekly competition.


FORMERLY MILITARY COMICS
MODERN
COMICS
10¢
Blackhawk battles the INVADERS FROM the MOON!

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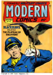
His virtuosity was rewarded with a scholarship to the Cleveland School of Art. Crandall was 18. He spent the next four years polishing his skill and style which was influenced by illustrators like Joseph Clement Coll, Henry Pitz, *Blue Book* artist Herbert Morton Stoops (who signed his black and white drawings Jeremy Canon), and especially James Montgomery Flagg. Painters like N. C. Wyeth and Howard Pyle also contributed inspiration to Crandall's growing repository of knowledge. Crandall sold his first professional work during this period—a children's book about pioneer life on the prairies. During his last year at CSA, he was awarded a traveling scholarship by the school.

"I spent my first summer after art school," Crandall recalls, "working at the Cleveland Branch of the Newspaper Enterprise Association doing editorial cartoons, Sunday supplement illustrations, retouching news photos and sweeping out the office. The following year, I struck out to New York where I got a job at the first place I walked into, which happened to be the Eisner and Iger shop. I worked there for one year, then began freelancing."

Quality publisher Everett M. Arnold recounted the story behind Crandall's decision to freelance. "Shortly after Lou Fine left Eisner and Iger to work for us, I noticed another artist in the Fiction House comics who had great talent. When Eisner and Iger delivered the material for the first issues of *Hit* and and *Crack Comics*, I spotted this same artist doing a strip for me(called Samar in *Feature Comics*)and I insisted they put him on more important spots. I learned his name was Reed Crandall and since neither Iger nor Eisner rated him very highly, they very willingly took Reed off Fiction House work and put him exclusively on features for Quality comics.

"The next time I was in the Eisner and Iger studio (it always drove them half crazy when I talked to their artists), I met Crandall and, after praising his great ability, I told him to contact me if he ever left the studio. A short time later, Reed phoned and made a date to see me in Stamford the following Saturday. I found Reed was only getting $30 a week (both Eisner and Iger told me they were paying him $100 weekly) so I took him on as a free lance artist, (not the same deal as Lou Fine who was on a salary) promising him all the work he could handle so he could make at least $1,000 a month.



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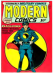
"It was a great break for me and during the next 12 years, Crandall produced thousands of wonderful pages for Quality comics as well as hundreds of covers. Of course, later when I had Reed do pencil jobs only, he squawked like a stuck pig (as did Jack Cole when I started to feed him scripts instead of letting him write his own stories), but these moves greatly increased our production. And both Reed and Jack were way ahead as I paid them the same money as before the change."

Crandall's first Quality book work besides Samar was a feature that ran in *Hit Comics*, The Old Witch, a short run strip that recounted tales of the supernatural. Before long, Crandall was working on a profusion of Quality headliners – Hercules, Firebrand, The Ray, Uncle Sam, Paul Bunyan, Stormy Foster and Doll Man.

Though his work on Doll Man was superb, Crandall was rather apathetic about the concept of the character. Super hero work in those days demanded full figures be drawn throughout the stories, and figures were Crandall's forte. To his frustration, Crandall found that any panel with a full-sized Doll Man could only contain a fragment of a normal being's anatomy. Conversely, a shot that included an entire ordinary man literally reduced Doll Man to an insignificant size. Crandall was delighted to drop the series.



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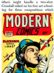
His decision to leave the Eisner-Iger shop was, of course, a practical one. Comics paid little enough without splitting page rates with a middle-man. When Crandall went to work directly for Arnold, he started his Blackhawk period.

Like the chiaroscuric Batman was perfect for Kane or the super-athletic Captain America was right for Kirby, so, was Reed Crandall to find his metier with Blackhawk. The strip made a number of special demands on its artists. The first was a natural, realistic style that allowed the strong characters in its cast to come through clearly. The second required a rigorous and authentic treatment of machinery, primarily the airplanes which would be seen continuously from every angle. The third demanded a knowledge of composition (or groupings) of figures which were plentiful in the strip, and good characterizations to tell them apart.

Crandall qualified on all points. Where Cuidera made Blackhawk a best-seller, Crandall turned it into a classic, a work of major importance and lasting value.

His attention to detail was never less than scrupulous. Planes, ships, guns and costumes were always well researched. No matter how much drawing went into a story or how many figures were required on a page, the art was never slack, careless or indulgent.

Crandall's approach to comics was that of an illustrator, not a cartoonist. If his drawings lacked the stylized power of Meskin or Kane, he made up for it ten times over with his unerring craftsmanship. He handled groupings of figures as easily as others might handle a two-shot. Crandall relied on his fine art schooling for these compositions which have yet to be equalled by any artist since. As a draftsman, he was every bit as proficient as Foster, Raymond or Caniff.



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Crandall was unquestionably skillful with the human figure, embracing a surgeon's knowledge of anatomy. Yet he was far from clinical in his approach.

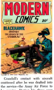
Crandall's figures were imbued with classic grace and inspired beauty. He confronted his subjects directly and realistically; still they always seemed to suggest a quality of sublime bravura, a larger-than-life vision that other equally skilled draftsmen were lacking.

His figures had weight which was always accurately distributed in whatever sitting, standing or kneeling position he chose to place them. That trick alone elevated him into a position of esteem among his peers. His mastery of human anatomy raised commonplace comic art to the level of achievement.

Faces were explosively expressive. Crandall's gift for nuance of character and *milieu* were brilliant. Wrinkles in cloth and leather were never better. And his women! Good girl or bad, they all posed suggestively, one leg bent, hand on hip, like none had ever done before. Thank God writers had the good sense to keep scripts brimming with them.

Besides his obvious drawing capabilities, Crandall was a master technician at rendering. Though most of his Blackhawk tales were inked by Cuidera, Alex Kotsky, Tex Blaisdell, John Belfi, and Sam Burlockoff, Crandall did ink a number of stories and quite a few covers by himself. Most of his inkers preferred a brush over Crandall's use of both pen and brush which he handled with meticulous precision. Frequently, great pencillers are poor inkers or fine inkers, mediocre artists. Not so with Crandall. His inks were inevitably the best.

Crandall's artistry breathed life into the Blackhawk series, infusing a climate of grim romanticism into every panel. Blackhawk's ruthless, icy demeanor made James Bond look like Winnie The Pooh. He was a man in total control—unapproachable, unforgiving, unfathomable. He was his own law and his own morality. He lived in a world dominated by an atmosphere of fatalism. He was the first comic book anti-hero.


MODERN
COMICS
10¢
MARCH No. 71
BLACKHAWK destroys THE SPAWN OF THE COBRA!

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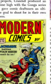
Crandall's contact with aircraft continued after he was drafted into the service—the Army Air Force to be precise. During his three year hitch, he utilized his talent by painting murals in mess-halls and dayrooms, plus a multitude of lesser tasks. But he continued to produce comics during his free time—evenings, weekends and on leave.

Home from the service, Crandall continued with the Blackhawk saga and other Quality features like Captain Triumph, Jeb Rivers, Arizona Raines, and Captain During. As the 50's began to take their toll on the comic market, Crandall offered his services to other publishers. He worked on the ill-timed *Tops Magazine* for Biro, produced a few *Classics Illustrated* books in collaboration with George Evans, did a number of Dell and Standard Comics, contributed a host of superb stories to the EC line, appeared in *Treasure Chest Comics*, and did advertising jobs for the Caine Studios.

His most outstanding work in the 50's, however, was relegated to a giveaway promotional book called *Buster Brown Comics*. Crandall visualized the adventures of Gunga, the jungle boy, and his elephant, Teela. The art was as beautiful and compelling as any since comics began. Where other artists would have been worn out by a lifetime of massive projects, Crandall produced an all-time high with the Gunga series and gave comic draftsmen an ultimate goal to shoot for in their own careers.


MODERN
COMICS
10¢
JUNE No. 74
BLACKHAWK battles CAPTAIN SQUID beneath the sea!

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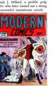
In the 60's, he moonlighted for Gold Key, Marvel, Tower Publications and miscellaneous black and white horror comics. Then Crandall peaked again with a new series, this time for Canaveral Press. His career had come full circle as he landed an assignment to illustrate a host of hardbound Burroughs' novels—the same books that had fired his imagination over thirty years earlier. Using pen and ink, dry brush, wash, opaque techniques, and scratchboard, Crandall proceeded to once more confirm his number one position with an uncontestably brilliant display of skill.

Though he almost never signed his name (except his EC stories), Crandall's work is unmistakable, distinguished by its unerring accuracy and naturalness. The history of comics has yet to produce another giant like him.

The same must also be said for Blackhawk.

Besides some of the best comic art, the strip also showcased the work of a number of top writers like Harry Stein, Ed Herron and Bill Finger. Science fiction author, Manly Wade Wellman contributed his part to the Blackhawk saga as did Joseph J. Millard, a prolific pulp writer who later turned out a string of successful mainstream novels.


MODERN
COMICS
10¢
OCTOBER No. 78
BLACKHAWK hunts the deadliest of the species, MADAME BUTTERFLY!

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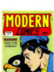
Few strips could boast a line-up of solid talent like Blackhawk. Because the formula left no possibility for visual superman-type stuntwork, stories had to carry their own weight by engaging the reader's imagination and intelligence. The variety of concepts, plot lines, and villains was uncommonly diversified with as few cliches as are liable to be found anywhere in comics. Consequently, only the best writers were assigned to Blackhawk. If one writer had to be singled out as the series' outstanding scribe, that man would be Bill Woolfolk.

Collaborating with Crandall, he produced a succession of first rate thrillers that have since become *the* classic Blackhawk tales. In *Military* 13, Woolfolk wrote the sizzling sequel to Blackhawk's origin story. It began with a three-page character study of a Nazi officer aptly named The Butcher. The sequence described how beautiful Countess Elsia attempted to escape from her captors and finally jumped off a cliff rather than return. The pursuing soldiers left her there.

High overhead, a gull circled the broken figure of the girl on the beach. Clouds ended the scene by crossing the face of the moon.

In a beautiful visual transition, the next panel opens on a crimson dawn. Instead of a bird, the silhouette of a two-engine plane crosses the morning sky and lands on the beach like an inquisitive hawk. A solitary blue-clad figure emerges, scoops up the girl and flies away. But his departure is viewed by the Butcher. "I would know that plane anywhere in the world!! Verdammte! I have an old score to settle with Black-


MODERN
COMICS
10¢
BLACKHAWK
stamps out the scourge of the SCORPION!

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hawk!"

The girl is taken to Blackhawk Island and although they try to save her, she dies during the night. A graveyard is added to the island community. Blackhawk swears to even the score and gets the opportunity when The Butcher slaughters an entire village. His men investigate and, while they search the ruins, are strafed by Nazi aircraft. One by one, they fall. Only Blackhawk escapes to pursue the German officer.

"I'm dreaming! There was only one Nazi flyer that good! Von Tepp! But . . . he's dead!!"

"I see your radio is open, Blackhawk! Well, I am Baron Von Tepp—the brother of the man you killed! I've been waiting for this day of revenge, pig!" snarls the Nazi ace, as the combat begins. But the aerial conflict is as disastrous to Blackhawk as his battle with the first Von Tepp. His plane is shot down. It crashes. Burns.

Von Tepp verifies his kill, "Blackhawk's done! No man could live through that!"

He returns to the Fuehrer in Berlin, then travels from country to country as the Nazi forces sing his praises. As he toasts "Blackhawk's wandering soul" in Belgrade, he observes a shrouded figure staring at him just outside in the room's courtyard. Beneath the hood, he sees . . . the face of Blackhawk. Without wasting a moment, he flees the country.

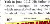
Blackhawk, it seems, had escaped the wreckage and is tracking the murderer of his squadron. Then he discovers they still live. He must make a choice—follow Von Tepp or save his comrades. He chooses the latter and performs a sensational it-could-only-happen-in-the-comics rescue.

Von Tepp escapes to Egypt, every shadow becoming the haunting figure of his pursuer. As he runs into the brightly lit desert, the shadows still follow—this time in the form of vultures. "Gott! Blackhawk!!" he screams as he runs deeper into the desert, so deep there is finally no turning back. Vultures drop from the sky as the tale ends.

Another Woolfolk page turner par excellence introduced Tondeleyo, the beautiful, mysterious woman of evil who showed up on Blackhawk Island and turned its occupants into cowards until Blackhawk died in an ambush in the sky. Woolfolk candidly admits he "borrowed" the idea from the 1942 film *White Cargo*, starring Hedy Lamarr.

He also penned the series' most memorable villains, the Nazi counter-parts of the Blackhawks—King Cobra and the Rattlesnake Squadron. Their uniforms duplicated their opponents', except they were colored steel gray with a black fanged snakehead replacing the hawk in the yellow chest emblem. The script featured the usual Woolfolk twists and ironies and a terrific sequence that had Blackhawk leaping from his airborne plane to the ground. After thirty years, it's the scene Woolfolk remembers best. "Only a genius like Crandall could have made it so believable!" he confirmed.

William Woolfolk was born in Center Moriches, Long Island, New York in June 1917. His father was a theatre manager, an occupation which necessitated moving the family about from time to time. Mostly though, Coney Island was the place they called home. For Bill, the excitement of traveling and the show biz background was a collective experience that helped shape his growing creative ability. He supplemented his knowledge with the chronicles of *Tom Swift*, *Baseball Joe*, and assorted H. G. Wells books.



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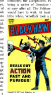
Woolfolk graduated from NYU and began his writing career by contributing to literary magazines long on prestige, short on pay. In 1938, he was chosen as "one of the four most promising writers of the year." More prestige. Then he began selling stories to slick magazines like *Collier's* and *Liberty*. At $300 apiece it seemed as though earning a living as an author would be as simple as catching a brass ring on a carousel.

Trouble was, the rejections outnumbered the acceptances. Perhaps being a writer of literature wasn't so easy after all. The Pulitzer Prize would have to wait. At least for a little while. Woolfolk took a job as a copywriter with an advertising agency at $23 a week.



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The pay was alright but the job was certainly not for Woolfolk, a kid who grew up with Coney Island, vaudeville and H. G. Wells. He quit his job in November 1941 and went to see editor Harry Shorten at MLJ Publications. That same day Woolfolk became a comic book writer.

His first assignment was for a strip called The Wizard. He wrote the plot synopsis and gave it to the artist who broke it down into pages, drawing the panels without words. Woolfolk would then fill in the captions and dialogue (the system is identical to Marvel's 1960's production method).

"I was already quite familiar with dramatic structuring and had, like everyone else, read stacks of *Dime Detective* pulps, *The Spider*, *Doc Savage*, and *The Shadow*. I put it all together and began writing for every MLJ character—The Black Hood, Steel Sterling, The Shield!" Woolfolk recounted the artistic requirements necessary to produce comics in the early years. "If you couldn't draw a warehouse, you couldn't draw comics!"

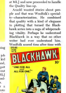
For every comic page he wrote, Woolfolk received $2. After a few months it was raised to $3. He worked exclusively at MLJ for about six months. Then Warren King, who was pencilling The Hangman, took some of his pages to Fawcett to show as samples for a job. The move opened the door for Woolfolk who began turning out scripts for Fawcett too.

He wrote for their top series, Captain Marvel, in addition to Bulletman, Ibis, and others. He created Captain Nazi and penned the early Captain Marvel, Jr. stories. Page rates were $3.50 at Fawcett.

John Beardsley was editing Woolfolk's Fawcett scripts at the time. Then E. M. "Busy" Arnold offered Beardsley a position at Quality at a higher salary. Arnold wanted to boost his already climbing sales by adding a top editor to his staff with the hope that some of the competition's approach might do him some good.

It did, of course, because Beardsley brought Woolfolk into the Quality group. Woolfolk, in turn, brought Harry Stein to the Quality stable. He and Stein had worked together at MLJ and now proceeded to handle the Quality line-up.

Arnold wanted stories about people and that was Woolfolk's specialty—characterization. He combined that quality with a kind of elegance in plotting that turned the Blackhawk series into a saga of whipcracking vitality. Perhaps he understood Blackhawk in a way that no other writer had ever understood him. Woolfolk scored time after time with really memorable stories about the winged warhawks, then did the same for other Quality strips like Doll Man and Plastic Man.



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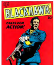
Like most writers, he kept workbooks of plot and gimmick ideas to use as take-off points for his tales. Woolfolk wrote an average of four to five pages a day, not many by comparison to most comic scripters. But he worked every day for a total of 120 to 135 pages (or 9 to 12 stories) per month.

He spent most of 1943 in the service before being discharged due to an old injury. In the meantime, page rates had doubled and tripled. So had the demand for Woolfolk's work. He continued working for MLJ, Fawcett and Quality, then added Timely to his expanding list of clients. Editor Vince Fago strategically assigned Woolfolk the front-line features: Captain America, Sub-Mariner, Human Torch, and the Young-Allies. Only DC was left.

Woolfolk made the contact and started writing Superman.

During those years, he was scripting major characters for five major publishers simultaneously. The task earned him the title of The Forgotten Man of Comics. Why? Because Woolfolk never created a series of his own on which he could sign his name. In fact, he was almost never credited with a by-line for any of his work. Editors sought Woolfolk to keep their best sellers on top. There was only one consolation. His bank account grew in opposing proportion to his reputation.



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In 1946, Woolfolk decided it was time to settle down with something other than his typewriter. Tall, ruggedly handsome, he had caught the eye of Dorothy Rubichek, a former Timely editor who was currently toiling at the DC offices. She was writing Lois Lane. He was writing Superman. They were married.

At the same time, Woolfolk initiated his own publishing company, O. W. Comics, with J. G. Oston. He produced two issues of *Mad Hatter Comics* and one of *Animal Fables*. They were disasters! To begin with, their printer had stalled them for months, causing them to lose an advantage they had gained during the war's paper shortage.

Anyone who had paper during the shortage became a successful publisher overnight because magazines were selling their entire print runs. O. W. (a prophetic name if ever there was one) had bought a catalogue business to get their paper rations.

Instead of printing the 48-page book that had been planned and contracted for, the printer produced a flimsy 32-pager. It seemed that he had ordered a 48-page book press which was never delivered.

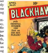
Comic pages had to be eliminated from finished stories. Others had to be cut apart and pieced together. The results were awful. Lawsuits were instituted against the printing firm but the damage had already been done. M. C. Gaines bought out *Animal Fables* and turned it into a successful book. O. W. Comics folded.

Next the Woolfolks teamed at Orbit Publications on crime, western, love and teenage comics. Then Bill started a line of non-comic magazines that were more successful than his previous venture. He juggled titles, kept his books topical and began showing a profit. He made money with *Inside Story*, lost it with *Space World*. After being in the publishing business for several years, he decided to go back into writing again.

Encouraged by friends and the right connections, he went to Hollywood and eventually became top scriptwriter for the award-winning TV series *The Defenders*. Then he took over as the show's editor, a tough, 30-hour-a-day job that paid quite well if you lived through it.

After two seasons, Woolfolk retired. Well, not completely. He continued writing scripts for TV's *Arrest And Trial* and had a final fling with comics by turning out a series of Batman paperback books at the height of the craze. Then he settled down to writing a string of top selling mainstream novels like *My Name is Morgan*, *The Builders*, *Opinion of the Court*, *The Beautiful People* and *Maggie*.

It had been a long way from Coney Island to Hollywood, from anonymous comic tales to glowing reviews in the New York Times. Or was it? Many of us still remember them, Bulletman, Captain America and the others Woolfolk had imbued with life. He remembered them . . . fondly.


APRIL No.29
10¢
BLACKHAWK
puts CRIMINAL NUMBER ONE first on HIS HIT PARADE!

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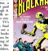
Blackhawk most of all.

The series pre-eminent period lasted until late in 1948 when The Blackhawks traded in their old prop planes. Now they flew jets that resembled the Douglas D558-1, an attempt at modernization that marked the strip's decline. Besides Crandall, other artists that helped Blackhawk fill his 40's pages were Bill Ward, Al Bryant, John Forte, Rudy Palais, John Cassone, Ruben Moriera, Chuck Cuidera, John Spranger and Dick Dillin. They all followed Crandall's style in varying degrees. Sam Rosen lettered many of their exploits.

Changes extended to the origin of the winged warriors. But instead of a pictorial recap, a text feature retold a version which not only bore almost no resemblence to the initial story, it lacked any trace of motivation or drama.

"When Hitler's hordes poured into defenseless Poland on September 1, 1939, a young American called Blackhawk by his companions, was a voluntary flyer in the Polish Air Force. His sidekick in the same squadron was a brilliant young student from the University of Warsaw named Stanislaus. The small but valiant Polish army was soon defeated and Blackhawk attempted to escape to Russia. Much to his surprise, he found the Reds were moving into Eastern Poland, so Blackhawk sought refuge in England.



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"While attempting to join the R. A. F., he met Chuck, another American, who was also volunteering his services. Soon they were joined by Hendrickson who had recently escaped from a Nazi concentration camp, Olaf, who, although a Swede, had fought for Finland during the first Red invasion, and Andre, the valiant Frenchman.

"After waiting months to enlist into the R. A. F. with no luck at all because none were British subjects, Blackhawk and the others decided to strike out on their own, taking the name of their leader and becoming known as the Blackhawks.

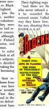
"The six then pooled their resources and brought six planes from a neutral country and it was here they were joined by the seventh member, Chop-Chop. First they operated from a small island in the Atlantic, but after Hitler was defeated, they relocated their secret base somewhere in the pacific where they battled the Japs. After the war, they remained a team so they could fight for peace and freedom everywhere."

When Quality folded in 1956, National bought all their properties, except Blackhawk, which they leased on a royalty basis and continued under the DC label (later they acquired full rights to the Blackhawk title). Though a number of the original crew still worked on the strip, the old magic was gone (*Modern Comics* had discontinued publication in October 1950 with issue 102). The Blackhawks now flew needle-nosed Lockheed XF-90's. Then their uniforms were discarded for garish green and red garments. Chop-Chop somehow became a straight heroic character. Lady Blackhawk joined the gang and became one of the boys (is nothing sacred?). Their pet hawk, Blackie, joined the team, then a midget called Tom Thumb Blackhawk. But most important, the tone, the crackling fatalistic atmosphere was no longer in evidence. Once-spectacular high-altitude thrillers now had titles like "Blackhawk's Secret Furlough" and "The Island of Super Monkeys". Robots and alien menaces began to creep into the strip.

It was time to retire. The Blackhawks had meted out their brand of justice for twenty-eight years. They had outlasted every other Quality hero. In fact, they had outlasted every hero–thousands, perhaps–with the exception of Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman. It was time to turn out the landing lights on Blackhawk Island–forever. The magnificent seven climbed into the familiar, worn cockpits for the last time.

Their fighting saga ended in 1969.

"And there are those who dare, who never refused a dare yet!" Let it be recorded the Blackhawks entered comic Valhalla in the only way they knew how, diving out of the sun, shouting their battle cry . . . HAWK-A-A-A!!



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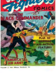
KIDA

# THE FLYING HEROES

Though he endured as the comic's number one fighting ace, Blackhawk found the killer skies of WW2 filled with airbourne competition. A multitude of super-wingmen soared out of the comic pages to shoot down their foes like flaming comets: Captain Midnight, Skywolf, Iron Ace, Hop Harrigan, The Flying Fool, Captain X of the RAF, Clipper Kirk, Skyman, Suicide Smith, The Bald Eagle, The Sky Rangers, The Flying Dutchman and a squadron of others.



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Of them all, the title of America's second greatest flying hero in the comics was claimed by AIRBOY. His saga began a full year before his first appearance. Alex Hillman, who published a line of romance and movie magazines, had decided to go into the comic book business. The theme for one of his comics was probably generated by the success of The Blackhawks. Hillman put it this way in an editorial that ran on the inside cover of *Air Fighters* 1, November 1941:

"CONTACT!

"Remember that old saying, 'Necessity is the mother of invention?' Well, like old friends, it sticks around. The development of the airplane is a good example in point.

"After the first World War, when military aviation cut its baby teeth, the progress of both military and commercial aviation continued. But, keyed to the times, its progress was necessarily slow and methodical. Then the present war started, and almost overnight the entire picture of aviation changed.

"Gone was the horse-and-buggy era of airplane development; we needed now a super-streamlined, highly-geared aviation industry. An industry that could match plane for plane with any combination of enemy countries. An industry that could produce on a gigantic scale the finest airplanes in the world. For the results of Hitler's blitzkrieg soon proved that these thundering birds of the air would be our first line of defense.

"And America responded – responded as only this great country of ours can. Production today is at the highest level ever known in the United States—and it's going higher, and still higher. In another year no other nation in the world will be able to match our capacity or our products, some of which—the giant bombers—are already conceded to be the finest ever built.

"Thus America forges ahead.

"We believe that all this had made the readers of America more air minded than ever before. And because we believe this, we think that you readers will enjoy a comic magazine devoted solely to airplanes—and to the gallant men who fly them, both in war and in peace. So, with this issue of *Air Fighters Comics* we take off."

Actually Air Fighters never took off. It stalled in the hanger.

The reason was simple. None of the features inside had the strength or stature to capture and hold a reader's attention. Each was no more than a second-rate filler. The cover and lead strip belonged to the BLACK COMMANDER.

Happy-go-lucky American ace Barry Haynes is arrested and jailed on the second page of his origin story —the charge: consorting with an enemy agent, a woman at that. At his court martial he is sentenced to be shot as a traitor. Back in his cell, he receives a visitor, the Chief of British Military Intelligence. The officer outlines an escape plan for Haynes which will enable him to become a counterspy for the country.

With the aid of a smoke-bomb, he escapes in a Spitfire only to be shot down later by a squadron of Messerschmitts. The Germans save him and put him back together, but instead of looking like all-American Tom Brown, he now resembles Otto Kruger. He's sent back to England, presumably as a Nazi agent, and discovers the only man who knows he's really a British undercover agent, has been captured by the enemy.

Then, he discovers information about a raid on English airfields. Haynes goes into action and steals a top-secret experimental plane called the Black Commander. Naturally, he routs the Nazi raiders: "MEIN GOTT! He's shooting us down like flies."

Now both countries are after him. What else is a mystery pilot to do? He hides out at his Aunt Martha's farm and sums it all up in the last panel as he talks things over with his plane. "Thanks, little Black Commander! You and I are both in bad with England! But one of these days she'll realize what we're doing —I hope!"

No, no one ever realized.

The other features (most of them done in the Funnies, Inc. shop) were TEX TRAINOR—Test Pilot; CRASH DAVIS—Navy Ace; America's Air Army; JACK DALE—Flying Cadet; THE MOSQUITO (a border patrol pilot named for his small stature and stinging vengeance); MACH DUFF (another test pilot); and THE BLACK SHEEP SQUADRON.

The art and scripts were average comic fare, but conceptually they were about as exciting as a deserted ant hill. No one had applied the comic formula to them: colorful characters with colorful costumes, outlandish origins, wild gimmicks, and action, action, action!!

Hillman knew something was wrong when the final sales figures came in six months later. As far as he was concerned, the disaster at Pearl Harbor was matched only by the tragedy of *Air Fighters*. But he stuck to his original idea about an airplane comic, this time putting an experienced man in the pilot's seat.

He hired Ed Cronin, an editor who worked for Quality Publications, to do the job. Cronin then turned to Charles Biro for help. Biro, who had created MLJ's Steel Sterling, was working on the Daredevil and Crimebuster books at the time. Cronin explained the situation to Biro—they needed a solid line-up of characters and a sensational lead feature. Could Biro help?

Cronin had indeed singled out the right man to get the job done. Biro was a living idea factory, and at any given moment could come up with a half dozen new strip ideas and accompanying plot lines. He proved it with Airboy. During the course of a single conversation he evolved the Airboy format and synthesized it into a working script.

Biro followed up by pencilling and inking the most shocking and dramatic cover to appear in comics up to that time. An orange blood splatter in the upper right corner proclaimed, "only 10¢—nothing like it!!" It meant exactly that, too!

The cover pictured, in close-up, a Japanese pilot clawing at his throat in a death agony as rivulets of blood jetted between his fanged jaws. His condition was clearly the work of a plane and its pilot that symbolically blotted out a rising sun in the distance. Yeah, but what a plane!

The steel-gray fuselage had a pair of air-cooled machine guns mounted on each side of the cockpit behind the bullet-shaped nose. Yet it was the wings that made the difference. They spread ominously, ribbed like a bat's, serrated on the trailing edge. The stabilizing tail matched with its own ribbing. It was easily the most exciting concept in aviation since Icarus!

"Greatest comic book yet!!" another blurb declared (the double exclamation marks had to be anti-climatic). It was balanced by a yellow question mark that persuasively asked, "Who is Airboy?" Readers found out on the inside.

Running out of the splash panel (clutching a .50 caliber machine gun almost as big as he was), came the character which another cover blurb had described as the one "you've waited for!!" His creators took no chances with yet-to-be-proven oranges or greens. They garbed Airboy in about equal thirds of sure-fire Superman primaries: red, yellow, blue.

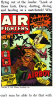
Skin-tight breeches were a vivid blue. A matching scarf (traditional aviator's equipment) showed through an open-throated shirt-jacket of scarlet. A yellow "V" was symbolically buttoned across the chest. Yellow gloves and boots completed the outfit which was just different enough —but not overdone—to be totally accepted. Perfect for a young comic book flying hero called Airboy.

"When our fighting men meet

death at sea, they go to Davy Jones' Locker—but what becomes of our flyers? Could there perhaps be a last landing field where dead aviators and such notables as Will Rogers, Knute Rockne, and all those who met death in plane crashes dwell? Yes, there could be and there is—and we are now going to that last landing field where Amelia Earhart, Billy Mitchell, Wiley Post, and the Wright Brothers are welcoming a newcomer, Colin P. Kelly!" (Kelly was a 26-year old West Pointer who became WW2's first hero by deliberately crashing his plane into a Jap transport ship).

Beginning in a cloud panel, a sequence is developed about the ethereal pioneers of flying (it was reassuring to know they all went to heaven), which all served to introduce an event taking place on earth. "Why at this very moment, a monk is on the verge of opening the door to one of aviation's greatest discoveries!"

Cut to a close-up of a black bat flying out at the reader. "Look at those bats, Davy, darting, diving, and landing on a matchstick! Why can't man be able to do that with the airplane?" A brown-robed monk counselled a small blonde boy as they stood watching in the background.



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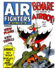
"A man named Cellini had the secret—wings that flapped like a bird's! Surely nature is the best authority on flight!" The monk's name was Martier. The orphan boy, Davy, lived with him at the California monastery.

Martier had worked up a design of the "bat concept" and built a scale model of the craft. In order to finance a full-scale construction of his idea, he decides to seek aid from a wealthy businessman. His companions caution him against it "Martier, you are courting the devil! Sessler is a bad man! He's always wanted this land!"

But Martier disregards the warning and mortgages the monastery property for $15,000. Avarice gleams in Sessler's eyes as he signs the papers (perhaps it was just his cigar smoke). A month later, he checks up on the old monk's progress and discovers, during a preliminary test flight, that the plane actually flies. Faced with the possibility of losing the mortgaged land, he sabotages the plane.



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The following day a public exhibition is announced. The kid helps Martier into the cockpit. "Davy, should anything unforseen happen, all my materials and plans are yours! Promise me to carry on!" Of course, the kid agrees. Spectators gasp as the "sinister batlike ship" takes off. "Good gosh! The crate's actually moving!! The wings! They're flapping like a bird's!"

The plane soars into the clouds. Suddenly, the engine stalls and the aircraft plunges back to earth with a terrifying explosion. "Sorry, son! Father Martier is dead! The motor crushed him," consoles a spectator. That night as the boy sits in the darkened hanger, he discovers the engine-clogging residue that sent Martier to his death.

The next morning, the wreckage is hauled to a farm where Davy intends to repair it. Meanwhile, Sessler converts the monastery into a gambling casino. "Those monks must be saying extra prayers over this!" he mocks sardonically.

Later, "a strange, bat-like figure appears out of the sky and swoops low." It's Davy, costume and all, flying over the casino-monastery. "Airboy's first duty is for you, Padre Martier! I know you're watching!" He releases a load of bombs (that fact would've killed off the old Padre if the crash hadn't).

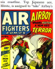
As the building is consumed with flames, Sessler rushes inside to retrieve his money. The roof falls in. A trio of monks sum it all up with, "It was truly an act of heaven!"

"Sessler's own sins caused his death!"

"But that plane—it was Martier's—Who?—How could it be?"

The first part of the story, complete in itself, ended at that point. The plot, obviously by Biro, was much too complex for a lesser talent to handle. Still, loose ends, awkward motivations, and choppy continuity detracted considerably from what was essentially a strong and dramatic outline. The second half of the story functioned to establish Airboy's capabilities and his working format.

It commenced to reveal Japanese plans to find the "mystery bird plane" for the purpose of building a fleet of superior aircraft. The plan was to lure the objective into the open by attacking along the California coastline. Top Japanese ace, Hirote, is assigned to "take" Airboy's plane when contact is made.



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Several panels later they clash over the west coast—30 Jap zeros vs. Airboy. His only comment, "Their squadron leader sees me! Here he comes, bat plane—we'll show 'em the stuff we Americans are made of—how about it?"

During their dogfight, Airboy runs out of fuel and lands, barely dodging the strafing machine-gun fire. Hirote drops a note: "Honorable fighter—must go now but would like to dogfight with you 30 days from now—same day—same time—same place. If accept, please fire gun and bring plenty gas. Hirote."

So, the 13-page story ended as Airboy fired a pistol and answered the challenge, the neatest gimmick yet for getting the reader to buy the next issue, same time—same place.

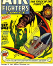
The following issue concluded "the most thrilling air dual (of course they meant duel—obviously Hirote was more literate than the writer) ever fought in the heavens." The Japanese ace crashed into a mountain peak after shooting the bird-plane to pieces. The story, however, dovetailed into another cliffhanger—this time with a Nazi spy, posing as a film director, about to cut Airboy's throat. Continued stories soon gave way to complete-in-one-issue tales.

Biro's idea had taken off immediately, becoming a monthly comic book. It was everything that Blackhawk wasn't. One was a grim realist, a relentless killing machine; the other was pure comics, a colorful skybound swashbuckler. One was a man who was aided by his team of vigilantes; the other was merely a boy who worked alone. Characterization was at opposite ends of the spectrum too. Blackhawk had as much as any comic hero of the decade. Airboy was one-dimensional and relied heavily on the appeal of his plane.

That was the major difference between the two strips. Blackhawk was unquestionably the star of his series, but Airboy played second banana to his plane. Being a boy in a costume helped, yes. But any pilot would have done as well.

Biro had specified a young hero as part of his axiom which stated that boys would identify with other boys, even in the comics. He proved it with Crimebuster and The Little Wise Guys. And again with Airboy. Whether Biro had expected it or not, Airboy was subordinate to the machine. Who wouldn't be?

Though it was referred to as "Bird-Plane" and "Batplane" in the opening issues, soon the craft was affectionately named BIRDIE. It's nose was bullet-shaped, resembling that of a Bell P-39 Airacobra, as was its back end. The cockpit was just about in the center. The tail stabilizer swept forward to become the pilot's headrest. The wings fastened onto the plane under the fuselage, the middle third being stationary, the remaining thirds supplying the thrust with a flapping motion.



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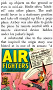
Periodically, bits of technical data would be supplied during the stories: Birdie's wing span was 32 feet, fuselage was 28 feet, rudder height was 4 feet. The sleek, black nose was covered with duraluminum. The red wings (black between the ribs) had a special rubberoid fabric wing covering stretched over half inch steel wing ribs. A heavy aluminum ridge covered the leading edge of the wing.

Another explanation gave the wing covering as rubberized canvas which enabled them to telescope or fold up like a bat's. Airboy explained the plane's mechanism like this: "Instead of opening a throttle, I just press this button—the harder I push, the faster the wings flap, and the higher I go! The tail and wings are built to let me stop in an instant and turn about! Birdie's really a mechanical bird! There's hardly a difference at all!"

There was a difference—Birdie was armed to the beak. A .50 calibre machine gun was mounted on either side of the fuselage and was fired manually by reaching outside the open canopy. In addition, twin machine guns were located in each wing, and another which fired backward from the tail section. A landing gear with hydraulic brakes folded up neatly under the plane.

The landing gear frequently doubled as a device with which to pick up objects on the ground or even in mid-air. Birdie often "hitched" onto other planes. The craft could hover in a stationary position and take-off straight up like a pogo plane. Airboy was also able to guide the plane by remote control with a minute electrical device hidden under his jacket's lapel.



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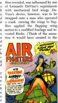
A substantial clue to the source that inspired the origin story was hinted at in one of its scenes: "A man named Cellini had the secret!" Certainly, Biro (who was always a voracious reader) was familiar with the life of the 16th century artist and adventurer. One of the incidents in Cellini's life involved a legendary secret flight—from a prison cell. It also included a monk he called the Castellion who, in certain respects, was Cellini's guardian.

The monk had delusions he was a bat and Cellini capitalized on that fact when he announced his intended escape, saying that he too was able to fly like a bat. He made his boast good and escaped from a solitary cell high in a tower. In truth however, Cellini worked on the rivets that studded his prison door and escaped with an improvised rope ladder. But the bat story was more colorful, so it endured.

The idea for the Bird-Plane itself, Biro revealed, was influenced by one of Leonardo DaVinci's experiments with mechanical bird wings. DaVinci's device, however, was to be strapped onto a man who operated a crank causing the wings to flap. Biro applied the flapping wing motion to a modified fuselage and invented Birdie. (Think of the sensation it would have created in the Batman strip, swooping out of the midnight sky like a mammoth bat in pursuit of criminals!!)



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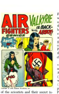
In his premiere tale, Airboy had the appearance of a 12-year old. By the end of his first year of adventures, he looked to be 16 or 17 years of age. During the life span on the strip, Airboy would realistically age about 10 years.

Writers finally got around to revealing their star's background in the December 1946 issue of *Airboy Comics* (the title had been changed a year earlier for obvious reasons). The tale disclosed Airboy's real name as Davy Nelson, the son of a prominent scientist. In the privacy of a deserted theatre, father and son were reunited.

The blonde-haired Professor Nelson explained that he had been one of four men working on a revolutionary jet propulsion system that would make space flight a reality. To protect their experiments, they had agreed to split up and work in secret. Nelson had put Davy in the care of the monks at the monastery because he felt a danger existed that could have placed his son's life in jeopardy. That issue's adventure revolved around the betrayal of one of the scientists and their secret inventions. The fact that Davy was described as an orphan in the initial story was conveniently disregarded.



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Exactly a year later (December 1947), more secrets of the origin of Airboy were revealed. In a flashback sequence he recalled Martier's words. "I shall teach you to fly so that you may learn the beauty of the heavens where the birds fly! And I shall call you the boy of the air. . ."

"How about just plain Airboy, Brother? That sounds better!"

"Ah, yes! And here, this costume, handed down through generations of my family!" The French monk opened an old trunk and lifted out the red, yellow and blue outfit. "You shall wear it when you grow tall and strong—it is the last relic of my family heritage!"

He related the Sesder story again and another pre-Airboy incident involving a trio of hoods who tried to steal the Bird-Plane's plans. Later in the story, Airboy returned to the California monastary and found Martier's record of his family history. It told how the colorful costume originally belonged to the Marquis Francois Martier de l'Orleans, a nobleman during the time of the French Revolution. The outfit was a symbol of the family honor.

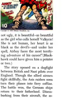
Though the Marquis was guillotined, his fortune (and his costume) was not found by his enemies, the Cotillions. Martier's record told the whereabouts of the fabulous treasure and Airboy took off after it to modern-day France. In the sewers of Paris, he literally re-lives history, enacts the Marquis' vendetta, and locates the treasure.

The tale neatly wrapped up a number of loose ends in the Airboy saga. All the incidents woven together tell an unusually complex and entertaining origin story. It all helped to make Airboy one of the most memorable heroic figures in the history of comics.

The young American eagle circled the globe during his career as a Fascist-crushing ace. One month he was patrolling the Atlantic coastline against a German submarine attack, then to England's war-torn skies to battle an airbourne "Whistling Killer" in an experimental silent plane, next to Norway to help a French general escape from a concentration camp. Italy, Germany, Asia, the Pacific, all were battlegrounds for the dauntless Airboy and his miracle-plane.

The aircraft theme always prevailed. Villains inevitably flew secret, lethal, experimental planes. Airboy took them on one at a time (like the Nazi plane that flew backwards and forwards) or in groups (one tale featured four axis super-pilots in four super-planes named Pestilence, Famine, War, and Death). None were good enough to out-fly Birdie or out-shoot Airboy. Only one antagonist was allowed to return again and again to alternately hinder or help Airboy's fighting crusade—the vivacious VALKYRIE!

She made her dramatic debut in November 1943, after a splash page caption that heralded, "This fear is not ugly, it is beautiful—as beautiful as the girl who calls herself Valkyrie! She is not human, her heart is as black as the devil's—and under her spell, Airboy faces the most terrifying adventure of his career!" (Blackhawk could have given him a pointer or two.)



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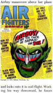
The story opened on a dogfight between British and Nazi pilots over England. Though the allied airmen fight skillfully, the Axis raiders soon turn their planes into fiery coffins. The battle won, the German ships return to their fatherland. Disembarking from their aircraft, the assault squadron is revealed as a corps of women aviators led by the raven-haired Valkyrie.

She was another of those deadlier-than-the-male species created in the image of the Dragon Lady: competent, coldblooded, cunning—and beautiful. She wore a green satin blouse, loose fitting, open to the waist, revealing a healthy expanse of enemy territory. Scarlet, skin-tight slacks were neatly tucked into black leather boots. A fur-collared cloak completed the ensemble. A river of blue-black hair tumbled over one eye in the old Veronica Lake style.

The sexy aviatrix flanked by her squadron, the Airmaidens, confirms her kill and her loyalty to her Fuehrer, then vows to meet Airboy in combat. Her challenge turns out to be a prediction as Airboy, who has followed them, attacks from the night sky. Valkyrie takes off in pursuit.

She scores the first hit, raking Birdie with a hail of German lead. Airboy maneuvers above her plane and locks onto it in mid-flight. Working his way downward, he forces open her cockpit. He's stunned, not only by the discovery that his opponent is a woman, but by a rap from her Luger as well. He draws his own gun but, "I can't bring myself down to shooting a girl!" She takes him captive.


AIR FIGHTERS
10¢
FALL QUARTERLY
SKY WOLF AND PALS TELL OF STRANGE ADVENTURE
AIRBOY! STAY OFF THE FACE OF JAPAN- OR DIE!
IRON ACE RETURNS FROM AMAZING EXPLOIT
FLYING DUTCHMAN SAYS JAPS' DOOM
BLACK ANGEL TRICKS NAZIS IN DARING MANEUVER
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On the ground, Airboy learns that the vixen has no such limiting code of chivalry as he takes a severe lashing from her. Valkyrie demands to be shown how to fly the Bird-Plane, but Airboy remains silent. That night, a trio of Airmaidens, impressed with his bravery, help him escape. They, in turn, are discovered and sentenced to a public whipping.

Though Airboy is hiding, Valkyrie finds him and agrees to free the girls in exchange for his plane's secrets. She seals the bargain with a kiss. "Whew!" he exclaims with his eyes popping and tells all.

Valkyrie reports to her commanding officer and betrays Airboy by revealing his hiding place. Her treachery is matched by her superior's as he orders Airboy captured and shot in addition to the Airmaiden's whipping. Valkyrie's eyes blazed. "So, this is the master who trained me to be a good Nazi! Now I can see the evil of my tricky ways! Well, while I can still change, I will!" She unabashedly emptied her Luger into the officer's back.

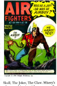
Rushing to the hanger, she takes command of Birdie and affects Airboy's rescue before a firing squad. "We've been on the wrong side," she rebelliously informs the Airmaidens. "You saw what they were going to do to some of us!"

The squadron (certainly the forerunners of Ian Fleming's Pussy Galore and Company) rallied to her call and taxied their planes into the liberating skies, ready for battle. "With Nazi brother against sister, the fight is all the more bitter—but Airboy and the Airmaidens steadily grind their enemy out of the sky!"

In the final panel, Valkyrie embraced Airboy and revealed she was ready to go to England to fight for "a real cause." His comment as his fingers made the familiar V for Victory sign, (or was it V for Valkyrie?), "We should do this more often!"

Valkyrie was a perfect feminine foil for Airboy's youthful vitality. The editors knew it and had her co-star in a series of aeronautic team-ups that had her alternately trying to take or trying to save Airboy's life. Their most memorable tale had them combining forces to combat the evil entity known as Misery.

Usually Airboy confined his activities to aerial adventures,but this was a pure flight into fantasy. Misery was "the host of all evil," shrouded in dark green robes, with a chalk-white skull for a head. Other comic criminals were equally as weird: The Red Skull, The Joker, The Claw. Misery's edge was his gimmick—a mammoth plane covered with white mold—a graveyard for aviators known as The Airtomb. The concept was as bizarre as any that ever appeared in the comics.



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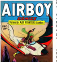
As the war drew to a close, Airboy, like all the others in the superhero brotherhood, lost the enemy he was created to fight. Of course, there were always gangsters and crime cartels, but they were only minor diversions for a boy and his plane. Airboy's writers had him take off in another direction and piloted him into a world of monsters, fantastic nightmares, supernatural happenings—in short, a world of the unknown.

The trend culminated in a tale of shuddering horror in the December, 1948 issue—*Airboy Fights The Rats*. It began with an epilogue that asked why "the rats have been watching man since the dawn of civilization." The rats, it said, had always been there and that when civilizations crumble, the rats rule. The scene changed to New York City. A newspaper warning of the rat menace washes down a sewer drain—into the lair of the rats.



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Thousands, perhaps millions, they waited to make their move. Comic book license allowed the rats to talk (at first glance rather amusing, but given some consideration, quite horrible). Across town, Airboy befriends a hurt mouse and is called upon by an aged professor who believes he's discovered the rats' plan.

That night, in Webster Heights, New Jersey, the rats attack. They begin by gnawing through the town's telephone wires, shutting down all communication. A repair crew arrives, climbs a pole and discovers the chewed wires. Then one of them observes, "Hey! What's them shiny spots down there?" Below, a thousand pairs of beady, glittering eyes begin to creep out of the shadows and climb the pole.

The town itself is peaceful; unsuspecting neighbors chat.

"Swell night, eh, Ben? Not a cloud in the sky!"

"Yeah! Say, there seems to be a big black shadow comin' up the road! See it out there?"

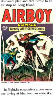
"It's rats, Ben! Millions of them! An army of rats! Let's get out of here! Run for your lives!"

In a long shot high above the town, a swarming black wave sweeps down the main street, across rooftops, down walls, driving horror-stricken crowds before it. In a one-third page panel (no dialogue here), the rats attack the helpless town folk, blanketing them with their writhing, furry bodies. Imagine Hitchcock's *The Birds* with rats, to get the full effect. In less than an hour, "the people of Webster Heights were no more. . ."

Next, the old professor who cautioned the world about the rat invasion is torn to bits in an alley. At Eastern Defense Headquarters, Airboy tries to figure out their main attack route. His pet mouse, Cheesie, points to New York on a table map and confirms his suspicions.

Then, the rats attack.

Firemen with hoses wash the rat army into the Hudson River as they funnel across the bridges. Tanks with flame throwers burn the rodents as they pour into tunnels and subways. Still they come, by the millions. This time across the river itself, swimming from the Jersey shore toward Manhattan. Airboy formulates a desparate plan and flies Birdie to an air strip on Long Island.



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In flight,he encounters a new menace diving at him from an eerie sky. An endless swarm of black flapping creatures blot out the moon—bats, the "rats' air force". Climbing, biting, clawing, they attempt to down the aircraft by sheer weight of numbers. Airboy maneuvers into an approaching storm that tears the bats to pieces.

As the rats close in on the Manhattan shore preparing to sweep over the city like a tidal wave of horror, Airboy appears in the sky with a squadron of planes. Together they momentarily halt the invasion by strafing and bombing the swimming rats. Giant bombers follow, dropping barrels of oil.

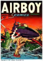
"As the oil drums hit the water with terrific force, they burst open, spreading the thick, stifling oil over the swimming rats! Blinded and half-paralyzed by the clinging, overpowering black blanket, the rats go mad with fear, biting and clawing each other in terrified frenzy—the invading rodents drown by the millions. . ."

In the Defense Commander's office, Airboy has an alarming premonition. "The rats have only been repulsed! I assure you, they have not been defeated! THE RATS WILL TRY AGAIN!"

The warning wasn't at all premature. In the very next issue, the rats returned.

They came from all over the continent to rally to the plans of their white rat leader: "Form execution squads and sabotage crews! We must strike in the dark, disrupting communications, killing key men in their government! Then, when our enemies are confused . . . STRIKE!"

Their first victim, Dr. Elmer (obviously an inside joke) dies in a plane crash after the rats gnawed at the control wiring. They chew through trestle beams, causing train wrecks. More plane disasters. A senator commits suicide while trapped in a car by the rats.



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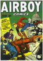
But the rats have another objective: to capture Airboy. They fear him and plan to kill him to bolster their confidence from their previous defeat. After several abortive attempts, Airboy realizes their strategy and allows himself to be captured. They drive him through a maze of tunnels for hours until he emerges on the floor of the gorge below the Grand Culvert Dam—the rat headquarters. Billions of them swarmed in layers across the rocky floor and up the walls as far as the eye could see. Airboy communicates his location to Washington with a tiny radio transmitter, ordering bombers to be sent to destroy the dam.

Just as the rats attack Airboy, a thundering roar rocks the gorge and a mountain of water rushes in to crush and drown the rat menace. By remote control, Birdie picks up Airboy and a dozen rats who scramble aboard for safety. The ship loops, hurling the rats into the killing flood which sweeps them into the ocean. Airboy circles the deluge, knowing that "they'll be scouting me as long as I live!"

The two-part terror tale combined the elements of a children's fairy tale (the talking rats, the benevolent menace) with equal parts of stark horror (the rat's intelligence and the execution of humans). Few straight adventure strips were ever as effective. The story itself was probably inspired by the terror classic *Three Skeleton Key*, which was narrated by Vincent Price on radio's Suspense series.



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Airboy flew a total of eleven and a half years until his fabulous Bird-Plane touched down for the last time in May 1953. Perhaps the fact that he had no super powers allowed him to live through the Golden Age 40's and into the 50's which demanded more realism and less fantasy.

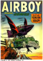
Most kid heroes that had their own strips (like Captain Marvel Jr., Superboy or Robin) on a long term basis relied heavily upon their adult counterparts for their success. Not so with Airboy. As Hillman's ace air fighter, he was on his own from the start and was outlived only by another Biro boy hero, Crimebuster.

Airboy's flight was charted by a number of artistic aces. Biro's breakdown of the origin story was completed by Al Camy. They were followed by Bill Quackenbush, Tony DiPreta, John Giunta, Dan Barry, Bernie Sachs, Art Peddy, Carmine Infantino, Dan Zolnerowich, John Belfi, and others, but Fred Kida was Airboy's premier penciller.

In 1943, Kida began his association with the series as an inker for artist Dan Barry, eventually taking on both operations. Kida was responsible for the mature Airboy and much of the strip's finest art. The unifying element of his style was his remarkable use of dark areas (artists call it "spotting blacks"). Kida's highly conscious placement of shadows and silhouettes added new dimension to the strip.

In Kida's best stories, Airboy became a kind of flying Pat Ryan (Terry and The Pirates)—less a boy aviator in a man's world, more a youthful adventurer with a sophisticated veneer. Simple comic drawings began to look more like magazine illustrations as Kida's knowledge and ability expanded. He built his stories around medium two-shots which caught every nuance of action and reaction among the protagonists. The drawing itself was solid and sensible. Inking was clean and forceful, always with a brush. Panels were well composed and utilized a wealth of background detail. As for the planes in the strip, Kida drew them better than anyone—with rows of evenly spaced rivets and a crackling shine on Birdie.

Fred Kida was born in Manhattan on December 12, 1920. As a teenager, he was profoundly influenced by the early work of Alex Raymond and Milton Caniff. He added to his knowledge of drawing at Textile High School, where he enrolled in an advertising art course. But comics were more exciting than straight commercial art jobs (and easier to work for, too). So Kida joined the Eisner staff and, after a term as inker and background man, produced Phantom Clipper for Quality. At MLJ Comics, he pencilled The Hangman while Bob Fuji inked, did a little work for Whitman Publications, and drew the Iron Ace, Boy King, The Heap and Airboy for Hillman.



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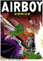
Page rates were about $20 to $30 for pencils and inks. Kida paced himself to produce a completed page every day. After Airboy, Kida turned his talent on the world of crime and issued a host of stories in Biro's *Crime Does Not Pay* title at $45 per page. He also found time to ghost the Steve Canyon newspaper strip briefly. In the 50's, Kida found himself on Timely's payroll, where he traded water pistol shots with John Severin, Artie Simek and Bill Everett. Between battles, Kida turned out a volume of mystery tales and took over the *Ringo Kid* book.

When the industry began to slide, Kida switched to newspaper comics, doing the Flash Gordon daily strip. Airboy, however, will remain indelibly etched with the Kida touch. In *Air Fighters 2*, he had helped another ace into the warring skies—THE IRON ACE.

Symbolically, he strode through the splash panel, a knight clad in chain mail and armor plate, slashing out with a two-handed broadsword against a flight of Nazi planes that buzzed around him like angry hornets. A caption framed in a scroll heralded his legend: "Centuries ago on a bloody battlefield of France, an Iron Ace fought side by side with Charlemagne! So great were the deeds of this mighty warrior, that at his death, Charlemagne predicted that this Iron Ace would live again—that when the last of his kin died by the hand of an invader, the Iron Ace would come to life and leap into battle as the champion of freedom!"



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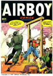
The story opens at the chateau of Doctor LaFarge in occupied France. A small group of patriots has gathered to discuss relaying important information to England. Nearby, Captain Britain, an R.A.F. pilot on a reconnaissance mission, is shot down by Nazi anti-aircraft fire. Seeking shelter, he makes his way to LaFarge's castle where the sympathetic Doctor cares for his wounds.

But Axis bloodhounds have tracked him to the castle. The pilot hides in the base of the glass case which houses the Iron Ace's armor. Nevertheless, the German troops discover LaFarge has aided the British airman and kill him while Britain witnesses the murder from his hiding place. "With that bullet," the Doctor gasps, "you gave . . . life . . . to the . . . Iron Ace—Ohhh!"

Britain hears his benefactor's dying words, and thinks, "The floor boards are old—I'll break through—if that armor fits me, then—"

Already the Germans have second thoughts. "Herr Captain, do you think there's any truth to that legend?"

"Ach! Stupid fool! Only an inferior race can believe in such fairy tales! We men of the Reich are too brave to—Himmel! It can't be! THE IRON ACE – HE'S COME TO LIFE!"



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Enemy soldiers throw up their hands as the blue-armored figure leaps through the glass enclosure and bears down on them, broadsword raised above his head. The Nazi captain grabs a machine gun and fires at his attacker. Bullets ricochet harmlessly away as the man of metal counters with his blade. "By the ghost of Charlemagne—I'll crush you puny mortals," he warns as he scatters the enemy invaders from the chateau.

Moments afterward, he attends to the dying Doctor who tells of a special plane in a hidden room below the castle. As Britain investigates, allied commandos invade the beach at Dunkirk and are greeted with devastating Nazi air power. "Like angry vultures, the Stukas dive, their machine guns roaring—the commandos are caught in a whirlpool of death!"

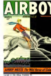
Then the Iron Ace appears in a blood red sky. The Axis hawks regroup to take on the strange intruder as he activates a special device in the cockpit. Instantly a series of metal plates cover the wings and fuselage of the plane in imitation of his own armor. "The Iron Ace in an iron plane! What a combination!"

Opening the throttle wide, the Iron Ace literally slashes Nazi aircraft in two with his armor-plated superplane. He allows only a few to escape to spread the word across Germany, across France, across Europe—the Iron Ace lives!

The concept of an "Iron Ace in an iron plane" was basically a sound one, and certainly a good enough premise upon which to build a supporting series. The knight of the skyways proved solid enough to remain airborne until February 1947. After Kida (who sometimes signed his work Fritzie), artists such as Bill Fraccio, Bob Fujitani, Maurice Whitman and Alden McWilliams became the Iron Ace's co-pilots.

Harry Sahle's BALD EAGLE was conceptually the weakest of the series that debuted in *Air Fighters* 2. Certainly it was the least engaging and poorest written of them all. Jack Gatling had earned himself the title "Bald Eagle" when he lost his hair "diving his plane through a fire in a rescue mission." He piloted the black 'Flying Coffin', a ship of his own invention that resembled a stubby Airacobra.

Dialogue was often amusing whether the writer had planned it that way or not. At one point in the story, Jap soldiers have taken him prisoner. "Put him in the big cage," an officer orders. "What do you think I am—a Bird?" our hero answers—then adds, "come to think of it, I am! The Bald Eagle!"


AIRBOY
COMICS
MARCH
10¢
AIRBOY MEETS The Wild Horse of Calabra

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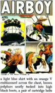
The feature that followed was considerably more exciting: a Dutch pilot avenging the death of his family and his countrymen, his fighting name torn from a centuries-old legend, his chosen color—a blazing orange, his calling card—a white rose of death. All of these together made up the winged warrior the enemy identified as THE FLYING DUTCHMAN.

He stood ready for action in the splash panel that preceeded his saga. Legs wide apart, bracing for any danger, he glared at the reader with savage eyes that seared like dry ice. Twin automatics with smoke trailing from their muzzles were gripped in massive fists. His garb was simple: a light blue shirt with an orange V emblazoned across the chest, brown jodphurs neatly tucked into high black boots, a pair of cartridge belts and holsters criss-crossing at the hips, a flyer's helmet and aviation goggles perched rakishly atop it. In the background, his plane burned symbolically, angry flames and billowing ebon clouds filling the deadly skies which were his domain.



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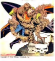
The tale begins aboard a ship, in the stormy waters of the English Channel. An American correspondent witnesses an aerial duel between a trio of Messerschmitts and a solitary orange P-39 Airacobra. Two Nazi warbirds scream toward the yawning sea in flames. The third escapes. He will tell others of the orange corsair's relentless skill.

The American asks about the identity of the victorious pilot. The ship's captain answers. "Bly'me if I know, sir! H'only our Winston and the Queen of the Netherlands know who 'e is! All we know is 'e lost 'is parents when the ruddy Nazis bombed his home in Rotterdam—'e escaped, yes 'e did—and he's fighting the dang Jerries like it's his own private war!"

Later that evening in war-torn London, a tall figure dressed like a Dutch seaman asks the old ship's captain for a match. "Hmm—the color of this fire is quite orange!" Dropping the match as it scorches his fingers, the captain suddenly realizes the identity of the stranger. The code word "orange" would be used often during the life of the strip. It was a predominent emblem color among Dutch aristocracy.



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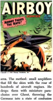
The captain is an agent who relays information about Dutch patriots who are slated to face a firing squad that very night—among them, a scientist who created a new bomb which the allies must possess. The mission is clear: stop the execution—help the prisoners escape. Then the stranger departs for another destination, his secret airbase in the Scottish highlands.

Midnight. The Flying Dutchman's plan—divert every Nazi plane in the area. The method: small amplifiers that fill the skies with the roar of hundreds of aircraft engines. He drops them with miniature parachutes over Ghent, throwing the Germans into a state of confusion and frustration.



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As he approaches his objective, he cuts his motor and glides earthward like a silent hawk, going unnoticed until it is too late to stop him. Directly over the execution area, he turns the engine on full throttle, startling the firing squad before cutting them down with his thundering machine guns.

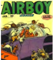
The patriots escape with the aid of underground agents and the Flying Dutchman. High German official, Colonel Voss decides to take off after the allied wingman himself—Voss who massacred the Dutch in Rotterdam, Voss who murdered the avenging ace's family. High in the crimson cloudscapes above the North sea, the two airmen begin their aerial Armageddon.

The orange Airacobra dives in a straight line on a collision course with the enemy Heinkel. As they converge, Voss panics and pulls back the stick. As his plane loops, the

Flying Dutchman rakes its understructure with flaming lead death. "Nein . . . Nein . . ," the Nazi foeman chokes as a torrent of crimson gushes between his agonized lips.

"Remember Rotterdam, Voss? I've been waiting two years to avenge our people!" the Dutch ace adds as the German plane becomes a flaming coffin. Then, as he soars over Rotterdam, the flying patriot drops five white roses. That night, his countrymen would know he has shot down five Nazi airmen. Tomorrow the Flying Dutchman will go into the skies to fight again.

Though the lead character had no super powers, special gimmicks, or even a mask, the strip had a kind of magic of its own. Perhaps it was because of Bob Fujitani's lively, stylized art work. Perhaps it was due to neat, just-right touches like the orange color and the business of the white roses. Probably it was a combination of them all. Whatever, it was good, solid comic book material.


AIRBOY
JAN. 10¢
THE RAT ARMY CAPTURES AIRBOY!

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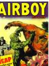
The name, of course, was taken from a 17th-century English legend. The tale told how the master of the ship Flying Dutchman, Captain Vanderdecken, was condemned for blasphemy. His punishment was to sail his phantom ship around Africa's Cape of Good Hope for eternity. If real-life seamen believed they had seen the ghost ship, it was considered an omen of disaster.

Actually, another airman had adopted the nickname during WWI. Anthony Fokker, the Dutch aeronautical engineer, was also known as the Flying Dutchman. He invented the synchronization system that allowed an automatic weapon to be fired through the propeller of a plane. To prove it, he mounted two Spandau machine guns on an Albatros D-1. Now a pilot could aim his plane at the target instead of shooting across the wings with a rifle. Fokker also designed many warplanes including the DR-1, the famous Fokker Triplane that was flown by German ace Manfred von Richthofen.



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Surprisingly, the writers weren't tempted to employ the "Phantom Ship" gimmick in the Flying Dutchman strip. No. They kept him a straight adventure hero but frequently threw in masked villains and weird antagonists to hype up the stories. Wendell Crowley and Bob Bernstein wrote a number of his scripts. Artists like Allen Ulmer, Tony DiPreta, and Carmine Infantino also championed the Dutchman's cause. They kept him flying until October 1946.

Another strip that made its initial bow in the same issue was heralded with a headline that stated: "She's black Death on wings!" A flying heroine with a costume was a novel enough idea to warrant a strip built around it. The opening caption read, "Death On Wings—and wrapped in dazzling beauty, her name spells horror to swaggering Nazis . . . THE BLACK ANGEL!"

She appeared without the typical origin story preceding her adventures and thereafter remained a woman of mystery. We knew her name, Sylvia Manners. We saw her underground hanger near the medieval castle where she lived with her aunt, Lady Lawton. But the how and why were never told.

TAILSPIN TOMMY
10¢
64 FULL COLOR PAGES!

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Her assets, however, were much more clearly revealed. A black satin outfit that looked like it was sprayed on distinctly outlined every curve and crevice of her body. The garment was a one-piece suit that covered her arms, legs and torso with a glistening blue-black sheen. A belt defined her tiny wasp waist just above the flare of supple hips. Concealing her hair, a matching helmet (with tiny wings above the temples) left her strong, beautiful face exposed. A plunging v-cut neckline swept upward to define a high, wide collar. Long gloves and folded-over buccaneer boots completed the Black Angel's garb. It was obvious that Miss Manners was one of the healthiest heroines in comics.

In her first appearance, the lady of darkness faced her Nazi counterpart, the Baroness Blood. Her manner of dress was almost identical to the Black Angel's, except her tights were a garish crimson and a swastika decorated her more-than-ample chest. The match was so interesting that the Baroness played a return engagement in the following issue.

BARNEY BAXTER
10¢

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Though the Black Angel was officially an avenging aviatrix, most of her adventures took place on the ground. Her midnight black plane (it appeared to be a Hawker Hurricane) was primarily a means of transportation and the instrument for a final showdown. It didn't matter. One sleek fuselage was enough for the strip.

Several sky-high thrillers teamed her with R.A.F. ace, Colonel Prince. She preferred to call him the Black Prince probably because his uniform and appearance were amazingly similar to another flying hero (artist John Cassone "borrowed" heavily from Crandall's Blackhawk strip). During their memorable first meeting, the Black Angel of Death replaced her revealing tights with a black strapless evening gown. The winged helmet, of course, stayed. Hillman dropped her contract when *Airfighters* became *Airboy Comics* with the fall issue of 1945.

The best of the supporting strips ran just after the lead feature. Editor Cronin deemed it important enough to claim a full thirteen pages, the same length as the Airboy story. Teaser copy headlined him as "an anti-Nazi prowler of the skies"—SKY WOLF!

POPULAR
COMICS
10¢
MASKED PILOT
GANG BUSTERS
THE MARVEL MAN

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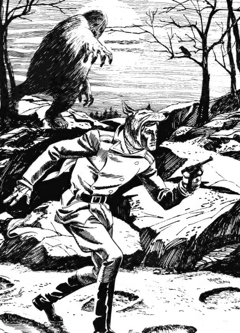
Like all the Air Fighter's characters, Sky Wolf had no special superhuman qualities. Instead, he had to rely upon a set of visual gimmicks, much like the heroes of the pulps. Sky Wolf had two to his credit. The tie-in with his name required he wear a white wolf's head like a cowl, as a barbarian might have a few thousand years ago. His personality matched the motif—relentless, savage, cunning.

Sky Wolf was Hillman's answer to Blackhawk. Both took their names from creatures in the animal world. One used the swift, sharp-eyed feathered hunter of the skies, the other, a four-footed predator of the forest. Both flying heroes displayed their symbols prominently, as part of their outfits.

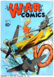
Sky Wolf was obviously created in the image of Blackhawk: tall, handsome, black wavy hair. In his first few adventures, he wore a purple costume identical to the Phantom's, but without the peppermint striped trunks. Soon, however, it gave way to military garb exactly like Blackhawk's, including the yellow scarf at the throat. (Dan Barry's version came closest of all, clearly "borrowing" Crandall's Blackhawk figures.)

The similarities extended still further due to the fact that, like Blackhawk, the Sky Wolf was the leader of a small group of self-styled vigilantes: The Judge, an Englishman rejected by the R.A.F. because of his age; Cocky Roche, tough, little Cockney with a quick wit and a sharp tongue; and The Turtle, a brave Pole whose tongue was cut out by the Nazis. (To communicate over his


MORT LEAV

intercom, Turtle rapped out Morse Code with his knuckles on his bare head). Interesting? Yes! But obviously outnumbered and outclassed by the Blackhawks.

Sky Wolf's second gimmick was a plane of special design. Inspired by the Lockheed P-38 "Lightning," the plane had two fuselages and two engines. Each fuselage had a cockpit—two pilots for each plane. When the action started, the craft would split in the center. Two planes became four. Each pilot took his chances and flew with one fuselage, one engine, one wing (and one prayer).



In the premiere tale, artist Mort Leav had more fun drawing the villain than the hero who came off second from a story telling point of view. That villain was Colonel Von Tundra, the Nazi Half-Man who met the Feuhrer on page two. "Dunder Und Blitzen," Hitler exclaimed, "What iss dis? Half der man is made from steel! He looks like a half-open can of herring!"

Indeed, he did. The left side of Von Tundra's face was sheathed in metal and riveted onto his face (talk about mean, that's mean). A matching collar surrounded his neck. His left hand was also made of steel with knuckles like huge bolts. A monocle was stuck in his good eye in the classic Von Stroheim style. He was the literary ancestor of Marvel's top villain in the 60's, Victor Von Doom.

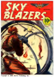
With teeth clenched, the Colonel admitted he was but half a man. "I was shot down from der sky by dot devil—der Sky Wolf!" The remainder of the story has Sky Wolf captured then rescued by his own men who impersonate Hitler and his aides. They also discover they have an ally in the enemy camp, a sultry singer named Frisco.

They all return in the following issue to encounter one of the most fantastic and original characters ever created in the history of comics. The story was written over an epic framework that utilized an opening flashback sequence.

"It is World War I—Baron Emmelmann, one of Von Richthofen's aces, fights a bitter air duel with an allied aviator in the skies over a great Polish swamp!" In the next two panels, the ravaging skies claim another victim as the German pilot's craft becomes a flaming coffin. "I must not die—must not die—Baron Emmelmann is not ready to die! No!"

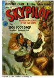
Captions told the story from that point on. "Emmelmann crashes in the lonely swamp, his body thrown clear of the plane, and lies silently in the swamp—it merges with the other dreary vegetation! But Baron Emmelmann's will to live has been a powerful force! Time passes—and brings an unearthly transformation that has drawn its oxygen food from the vegetation—a fantastic HEAP that is neither animal or man!

Heap! The very name conjures up images of the unknown—unspeakable, indescribable, undying. Heap! Neither human nor beast, yet with the form and instincts of each. Heap! Covered with a thatch of bristly swamp growth and decades of fetid slime—and alive!!!



"Now the indescribable form actually moves! But it needs oxygen—it will draw it in quantity, especially from the blood vessels of animal or man! An unsuspecting sheep sidles up to the strange Heap—then a dart-like thrust that belies its clumsiness—the bleating sheep is crushed in a terrible grasp—then, silence! Its strange hunger satisfied, the Heap now moves about the swamp! As time passes other animals know the same fate! It seems indeed that such a creature cannot be of this world! The Heap is supreme master of his domain!"

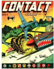
The flashback ends. The story returns to the time of WW2 as Von Tundra plans to execute an entire village in war-ravaged Poland. Suddenly the crimson sky is filled with the Sky Wolf squadron. Nazi war birds retaliate and in the ensuing dogfight, Sky Wolf is shot down. Nearby, "slumbering in the morass, The Heap stirs restlessly as he hears the bark of the guns and the roar of the motors!"



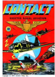
Sky Wolf crashes to earth and Von Tundra lands close by to verify his kill. But the lumbering Heap intervenes, driven by the shadowy memory of an existence long dead. Horrified, the Axis ace attempts to shoot the creature. But no bullets can kill The Heap who, apparently without comprehension, picks up his would-be assassin like a curious toy. "The German words strike a familiar chord in The Heap's conciousness—it pauses, tenderly eyeing the half-man!"

Then, The Heap carries his victim into the nearby town of Rodz, where the patriots wait for the firing squad. Before the terrified populace, the swamp creature drops Von Tundra to feed on a live pig. At the Colonel's command, soldiers chain the Heap to a tree, planning to use him to annihilate the community.

Sky Wolf and his men have also been captured, but their ally, Frisco, helps them escape. They attack from the air a second time and break up the intended execution. During the attack, the powerful Heap rips off his chains and attempts to capture the red-haired singer. Sky Wolf, seeing her plight, drops a bomb on her pursuer. "But is the monster really dead?" a caption asks. Von Tundra curses the Sky Wolf in the final panel as their planes head toward the horizon.



Originally The Heap was white, but soon became an undulating undergrowth of mottled brown and green, best described as a walking haystack or a gorilla with a gland condition. Hands and feet (when they could be seen) looked like eagle's claws. Sometimes shadowy eyes and a mouth appeared vaguely beneath the hairy shag, but the nose was the exquisitely bizarre touch. It snaked down from the middle of the head like a small elephant's trunk or, more precisely, like an armadillo's tail. The Heap could easily have been 500 to 800 pounds and at least eight feet tall.



Writer Harry Stein's concept turned the character into the greatest monster of them all by adapting freely from the world's classic horror tales. He lived on blood like a vampire, had the strength and immortality of Frankenstein, looked like a combination of a werewolf and the abominable snowman, and had a touch of the Golem too. With all this going for it, how could it miss? The Heap returned.

And returned.

And returned until he finally became so popular he grew to a stature that enabled him to star in his own series. Apparently true to his nature, The Heap outlived his parent strip, Sky Wolf, which was grounded in January of 1947. Bob Fujitani, John Belfi, Al McWilliams, John Giunta, and others had all made the flight with him, keeping the strip well above par artistically.

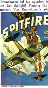
When The Heap made his next appearance, the tale revealed that he had lived through the bomb blast and ravaged a German airfield, actually commandeering one of the planes. Later in an aerial duel with

◁ Mort Leav's immortal HEAP from the SKY WOLF series the Sky Wolf, the monster is shot out of the sky. Though his plane crashed to earth like a fiery comet, the question again arose—could The Heap still live?

Slowly, very slowly, a metamorphosis was taking place in The Heap's character. In his first adventure, he had been a frightening, evil entity, living ghoulishly on blood. In the next tale, he began destroying Nazi air bases. Whether the readers or the publishers were aware of it, the fantastic Heap was undergoing a change that would be destined to make him a classic among thousands of other comic creations.

When he returned again in the Fall 1945 issue of the Sky Wolf strip, his legend was embellished by a wealth of significant detail and characterization. The strip opened on an era long past—the date: October 12, 1918. The place: Germany. Baron Von Emmelmann was alive again. Just before he prepares for the mission which will be his last, a letter arrives with a picture of his beautiful wife and baby. "I cannot wait for the war to be finished! No man ever had more to live for than I have!"

Captions continued to tell the story. "That same day Baron Von Emmelmann led his squadron into it's last skyfight! Flaming like a meteor, Von Emmelmann's plane hurtled from the skies—it was the death plunge!! Later when the squadron returned to its base, a final toast was drunk to the Baron! And so, Emmelmann's life story ended—or did it?



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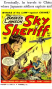
"No one could survive that crash! But the will of the Baron to live was something that defied the impossible! Somehow, a tiny flickering spark of life remained! His mind seemed dead, his body merged with the vegetation, but the dim, blind will to live did not change with the passing years!

"The elements worked on his battered body, but he breathed and drew life from the ground like some incredibly primitive animal—and one day, nature's fantastic product, born of a dying man's will to live, was revealed to the world—a formless monster that learned to feed on the oxygen taken from the veins of living creatures! It's first victim was a husky shepherd dog! This monster soon was known as . . . THE HEAP!

"He became a legend and a terror! People, animals, and fowl were found horribly mangled!! Always The Heap moved on, across the great Steppes and frozen wastes of Siberia, impelled by the desperate craving for food to maintain its natural life!"

Eventually, he travels to China where Japanese soldiers capture and cage him. The mute Turtle is also their prisoner and is forced into the monster's cage. The awesome creature shuffles forward and pulls the aviator toward his gaping jaws. Suddenly a scream interrupts the slaughter. The Heap pauses. That scream, that voice, one among many spectators. The monster drops his victim; he seems to recognize the shriek—a woman's! The woman was a missionary who came to China to aid the sick and wounded, the victims of war—to help them live, not suffer and die as her husband had done so many years ago. That woman, a German noble—The Baroness Von Emmelmann!!


WINGS of the LAW—against CRIME!
BREEZE LAWSON
Sky Sheriff
10¢
CIRCLE GROUND WITH AMERICA'S "PROWL" PLANE" PATROL!

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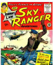
In a blind rage, the savage Heap rips his cage apart and carries the woman off. At the same time, Sky Wolf attacks from the air, hoping to rescue the Turtle. In the conflict, the Japanese soldiers inadvertantly kill the woman. Barely comprehending the situation, the towering creature gently lays her on the ground. Then, after a moment, he slowly rises. "There is a terrible purpose now in his shambling walk—a purpose that explodes into violent murderous action!"

Now an uncontrollable berserker, The Heap attacks the uniformed guard with a single thought—to maim, to kill, to destroy. The blood



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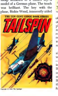
lust of the beast that dwells inside him explodes into savage, devastating fury. Knee-deep in carnage, The Heap wreaks his vengeance upon the soldiers until their hail of gunfire finally cuts him down. Sky Wolf and his men have escaped. The Heap and the woman lay sprawled over the rocks. "But is The Heap really dead? Or can his fantastic will to live once again triumph over death???"

Readers knew the answer and they were right. The Heap reappeared again, this time in America, where he had been smuggled by a malevolent zoologist. Sky Wolf blew them both up at the end of the story. The Heap survived again and, in his next adventure, began to solo. The October 1946 issue of *Airboy* heralded The Heap's top billing. To add even more surprise, he now had a co-star—believe it or not—a kid sidekick.

Though The Heap was his usual self, the format built around him required some drastic changes. And what better writer to make them than Bill Woolfolk! The series became comic dynamite. Woolfolk's newly structured scripts had The Heap attracted to a child's toy—a model of a German plane. The touch was brilliant. The boy with the plane, Rickie Wood, innocently aided the hulking behemoth by supplying baskets of meat and vegetables for food. Yet sometimes he feared the man-beast and entertained thoughts of betraying him. Somehow, it all seemed believable.


THE TEN CENT COMIC BOOK SERIES
TAILSPIN

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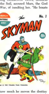
Scripts were never better. One had the kid buried alive with the Von Emmelmann pearls around his neck. From within the grave, he guides his model plane by remote control, leading The Heap to him. Tearing at the earth, the giant frees the boy. Later, the jewel thieves face the creature's wrath. Then, escaping into a densely wooded area, "fierce eyes study the pearls, and somewhere in the dark regions of his mind, he realizes that they belong to him—the last remaining Emmelmann!!!"

Another yarn had the entire Emmelmann castle turn up intact, rebuilt stone for stone, in America. Again The Heap is instrumental in bringing his own brand of justice to an evil human. Then, in October 1947, another origin story was added to The Heap's sensational saga.

This time the opening was set in Olympus, the home of the gods. Surrounded by marble columns and extravagant architecture, they argued among themselves. Ceres, Goddess of the Soil, accused Mars, the God of War, of insulting her. "He boasts of how much he moves the destiny of the world, while I but feed his plundering warriors! Were I given an opportunity to place one of my subjects amongst men and be allowed to shape its destiny, I could undo some of the evil you foment on earth!"



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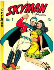
Jupiter grants her wish and singles out a German fighter pilot whose plane has just been shot down—Baron Von Emmelmann. "This man is your key to the animal kingdom! If your will is strong enough, you can lure him into your world and make him one of your creatures! Here is your test! If you do mold this man of evil into a thing to follow the laws of nature and being good to earth, then you shall prove Mars wrong!"

Standing majestically in the overgrown swamp, Ceres works her magic as the winds of time gently furl her flame-hued tresses. "My patience will work on you, O heap of a man, until you take root in the earth and take food and life from it! You are growing as sturdy as an oak! You shall be my subject on earth to walk in the animal kingdom and bring it the good of nature. So it shall be!"

The years speed by—then, 1942. The Heap lived again.

Time after time the coming of The Heap was retold. Emmelmann died a fiery death, over and over, always to be resurrected. The series took on mythic proportions. Religious implications were obvious. Like Christ, the persecuted Emmelmann had died for our sins and returned from the dead as the immortal Heap to save mankind. Eventually, he developed the power to control all things that grew from the earth and used them in his war against the forces of evil.

The Heap became a strip of nightmare brutality. Theives, traitors, and murderers were found in the Heap's wake — crushed, maimed, broken, drowned. Stories were profound, disturbing, and compellingly readable. A strong unifying theme emerged from the series, perhaps the most interestingly stated theme ever to appear on the comic page—who was the real monster—the creature or the corrosive society that produced him? HIM OR US?



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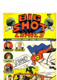
The business of airplanes and dogfights was over. Stories were constructed around ordinary people in crisis, much like The Spirit's. The Heap often was relegated to a two page appearance during which he resolved any crisis with his strength or powers. Here at last, were tales with a point of view, apocalyptic fables which must be considered unacclaimed masterpieces. They survive not as great examples of comic art, but as a memorable series which portrayed a genuine original on a purely conceptual level.



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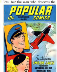
Out of the comic universe beastiary, The Heap was a testimony to the human spirit, cut from the same cloth as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Final proof of the series equity, is the afterlife of the piece, the residue it leaves on one's mind after its exposure. In that respect, one Heap was worth a dozen Green Lanterns or Steel Sterlings. Ask anyone who was there!

The final phase of The Heap's life trancended mere mortal adversaries as writers pitched the creature into a phantasmagoria of vampires, werewolves, ghosts and other non-human entities. Looking back, The Heap had done it all—from costumed hero to crime yarns, from straight adventure to supernatural thrillers. His odyssey had lasted over ten years, until the May 1953 issue of *Airboy*.

Through the years his wanderings had been recorded by a host of top artists like Art Peddy, Bernie Sachs, Mike Roy, Carmine Infantino, Dan Barry, Len Starr, and Frank Bolle. The Heap varied with each, sometimes taller, sometimes heavier, sometimes more human, sometimes less. But the man who deserves the most credit is the one who designed the prototype, the original model—Mort Leav.



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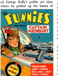
Leav was born in Manhattan's Harlem Hospital in July 1916 and grew up in a creative atmosphere induced by his family. His sister wrote for the pulps using the name Clara Chanin, while his brother went to the National Academy of Design and worked for cartoonist Bod Fisher as a tracer for films. But young Mort aspired to be a slick magazine illustrator with Charles Dana Gibson as his main inspiration.

Working toward that end, he joined George Kelly's public art class where he picked up the basics of anatomy and composition. In 1936, he won a cartoon contest sponsored by the *New York Evening Journal* with his own strip—Tomboy Peggy. By the time he was 21, Mort was earning $78 a week. He had landed an art job producing work for a South American newspaper, not exactly his idea of success.



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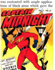
He continued looking for jobs (mostly on lobby directories) and found one in The *Daily News* Building with Editor's Press Service. Mort's job consisted of translating comic strips into Spanish. It seemed as though he just couldn't get out of that groove. At least not for two and a half years. Then, through EPS he discovered the Eisner and Iger Studio (Eisner left to form his own shop just about that time).

In January 1941, Mort made the contact with an armful of drawings. The first few samples were all Iger needed to make an offer of $30 a week. Mort countered,asking for $55. They settled for $45 and Mort started his first assignment, ZX-5. For the next two years, he put dozens of comic adventurers through their paces, like Rusty Ryan, Uncle Sam, Betty Bates, Hack O'Hara, The Hangman, Sally O'Neil, and Doll Man among others.

When Ed Cronin had called the Iger shop for help in putting the second issue of *Air Fighters* together, Mort Leav was assigned the Sky Wolf strip. Harry Stein, who was working for a number of publishers including Quality and Fawcett, was designated to write the series. As one of the script-writers for Blackhawk, it was natural that Stein think along those lines for the Hillman series. But when he described his idea for The Heap to the Iger shop bullpen, it got nothing but laughs. Stein played with names like The Mass and The Pile, before finally settling for the rather ludicrous-sounding Heap.

One look at Leav's visualization of the character changed any preconceived image. Suddenly the word "Heap" took on an ominous tone. To comic readers, he became a nightmarish classic that lurked alongside Dracula, The Mummy, or The Wolfman. Yet his creators had no idea how popular The Heap would become. He was a freak in more ways than one.

Leav's early comic book work employed an illustrator's approach rather than the simple silhouette drawing most artists used. When he inked his own pencilling it was always the best. His use of line shading built forms and figures solidly on the comic page; his rendering was contrasted with ample applications of black areas which gave the page and the objects on it the aspect of weight.



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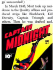
He made up for the lack of authenticity on his airplanes (often drawn by background men) with his talent for comic exaggeration. Hitler became a straggly-haired tyrant, underlinings were simple-minded caricatures, villains sneered defiantly and showed a full set of teeth. Mort did his best to keep the comic in comic books.

He applied that rule to his activities in the studio too. If the day's routine would begin to border on boredom, Mort might liven up the atmosphere by casually brushing a streak of rubber cement across five or six drawing boards and setting them afire.

On another occasion, he repeated the stunt in Iger's office to get a rise out of secretary Ruth Roche. "I enjoyed her expression so much," Mort recalled, "I took too long to blow it out!" The results left a scarred trail across the veneered top of the boss's expensive desk. Mort's sense of humor suddenly vanished. He wondered if he could still get a job on that South American newspaper. Then he remembered a hardware store just around the corner. Before anyone could say, "It was nice knowing you," Mort was back with a handful of steel wool and a bottle of furniture polish. He did the job like an expert and made a mental note to confine his sense of humor to safer places.

Around that time another lady joined the staff. Winnifred Belefant, just out of New York's Cooper Union School, was hired by Iger to white-out pages for corrections. (Any tricks Mort used when courting her before they got hitched must go unrecorded!)

In March 1943, Mort took up residence in the Quality offices and produced strips like Blackhawk, Kid Eternity, Captain Triumph and others. Then he was drafted and, from March 1944 to December 1945, served in the Army. Afterwards he returned to comics at Timely where he produced eight Captain America tales for editor Dorothy Woolfolk.



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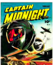
Then he joined Orbit Publications as art director and top penciller for *Wild Bill Pecos, Wanted, Patches,* and *Taffy.* Dot and Bill Woolfolk wrote all the stories for lady editor Rae Herman. Page rates were now $40 to $45. Covers were $50 per with an extra $10 for coloring. Mort turned out an enormous volume of work with the help of a background man, an outliner, and a letterer who put in all dialogue and captions before the drawings were done.

The schedule was often tight. Once Mort inked an entire story in one day. That, in itself, isn't too unusual, but the fact that there were no penciled drawings to ink is! He simply drew the story with a brush. Another experiment did away with the inking entirely. Mort drew the job in carbon pencil, which photographs as black as ink. However, the technique was abandoned because it lacked the neat, clean "comic" look.



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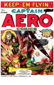
When Orbit folded in the mid-50's and the great comic purge was on, Mort decided to investigate the commercial art market. He joined a small art agency and produced the first TV storyboards (a series of pictures just like comics that plan out the visual development of a sequence, usually a commercial). He tried out a few newspaper strip ideas including *Hotel For Women* with Bill Woolfolk. Finally, he became a full-time staffer at one of Manhattan's leading ad agencies.

Looking back over all he had done in the comics, The Heap remains as one of his most extraordinary accomplishments.

Though he vanished from the comic world, the concept that spawned The Heap would reappear time and again, just as he had often done. The most notable reincarnation occurred in the super 60's as one of Marvel Comics' Fantastic Four team—The Thing. Though his skin is orange and he smokes a cigar, remember this point when you smile at his wisecracks—beneath that rocky hide lurks the spirit of a German fighter pilot that men once called . . . The Heap.



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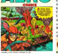
*Air Fighters/Airboy Comics* was the flying hero magazine of the 40's, housing the most impressive assemblage of aces yet placed between covers: Airboy, Sky Wolf, Bald Eagle, The Flying Dutchman, Black Angel, and The Heap. As they were dropped over the years, other fillers replaced them.

SKINNY McGINTY was the first, and one of the few cartoon features ever published in *Air Fighters.* JOHNNY HALFBACK was a Damon Runyon type character with empty pockets and a million dollars on his mind. He must have been quite a con man to edge his way into a book built around aviation.



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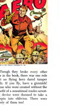
RACKMAN was equally incongruous. The entire Mansfield family lived in seclusion on Mansfield Island off the Atlantic coast. Though they were extremely wealthy, they never appeared in public because they were . . . dwarfs! But with the aid of extension "racks" attached to his legs, son Craig could become normal height. Taking the name Rackman, he did his best to outmaneuver his father while helping others "less fortunate than himself."

A series entitled THE MODEL BUILDERS was instituted with Airboy himself offering tips and tricks on model plane building. Another filler strip was more in keeping with the magazine's concept: Link Thorne, THE FLYING FOOL!

Created in the tradition of films like *Tokyo Joe* and *Captain China,* the title character ran an aircargo service out of Shanghai with the aid of his oriental secretary, Wing-Ding. Each thriller pitted his skill against a competitor airline owned by Riot O'Hara, a sizzling Irish beauty who was a Maureen O'Hara lookalike. Intrigue, suspense, and split-second plotting were the formula elements in the opening seven tales written, pencilled and inked by Jack Kirby. Toying with ideas like *She* and *Shangri-La,* Kirby produced a minor but memorable series for the Hillman magazine.

Kirby had flown a few previous missions with a pair of comic pilots. WING TURNER, Test Pilot, barely got off the ground in *Mystery Men* as did TED O'NEIL in *Prize Comics.* The latter was an American Pilot in the R.A.F. who shot down Stukas and Messerschmitts. What else?

Of course, most newspaper strip aces winged their way into the comics sooner or later. Surprisingly, none of them were really successful, though several starred in their own magazines. Pioneer pilots like TAILSPIN TOMMY and BARNEY BAXTER reprinted more than a year's adventures in a single book. JOHNNY HAZARD and STEVE CANYON headlined in their own books as did sometime-flyers TERRY AND THE PIRATES and DON WINSLOW. Other strips became fillers: SMILIN' JACK, ACE DRUMMOND, SCORCHY SMITH, TIM TYLER, CONNIE, CAPTAIN YANK and SKYROADS. Many of them showed up in movie serials, radio shows and Big Little Books. But those aviators spawned in the comic books were still the best of their breed.



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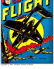
Though they broke every other rule in the book, there was one rule that no flying hero dared tamper with: If you fly, have a gimmick! Those who were created without the benefit of a sensational reader-arresting device were doomed to take a tailspin into oblivion. There were plenty of them too!

Most of the secondary comic publishers carried aerial adventure strips that the bigger companies ignored completely in their line-ups. Almost all of them ran as filler features in 1940 and 1941. BUZZARD BARNES and his SKY DEVILS took off in *Rocket Comics* and was followed by the ANZAC HAWKS in *Rangers of Freedom*, EAGLE EVANS in *Bomber Comics*, and TOM, DICK AND HARRY, American Air Adventures in *Jumbo*. RED HAWK was an American Indian who flew in *Blazing Comics*. THE GREY COMET starred in *Camera Comics*, WINGS BORDEN appeared in *Whirlwind*, and FLYIN' FLYNN–the Barnstorming Yankee, showed up in *Champ Comics*. Pulp pilot, LONE EAGLE, soared under the *Thrilling* title for Standard as did LUCKY BYRD–Flying Cadet, Harry Campbell's air strip for *Target Comics*. SKYROCKET featured a 750-mph jet and its inventor in a book with the same title. THE BLACKBIRD was another inventor who flew his special plane in the pages of *Blue Beetle Comics*.

Scorchy Smith imitations could be had by the hangerful. Ray Houlihan's SCOTTY OF THE SKYWAYS throttled off the runway in *Super Spy*, to be matched by LOOP LOGAN in *Blue Ribbon Comics*, the BLACK ARROW in *Green Giant*, the BLACK FURY in *V-Man*, and SKY RANGER in *Funnies*. STRUT SIMMONS had the Johnny Hazard/Frank Robbins touch.

Some of the flying heroes specialized, like DICK STAR OF THE F.B.I. in *Bang-Up Comics*, WINGS JOHNSON OF THE AIR PATROL in *Top-Notch* or SMOKE BURNAM, "greatest stunt pilot of all time" in *War Comics*. WAR EAGLES, The *Devil's Flying Twins*, piloted a series by Ed Smalle, Jr. through the pages of *Zip*. Russell Keaton's FLYIN' JENNY spotlighted the racing plane idea in *Heroic Comics*.



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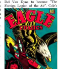
Storm Allen, THE SKY HAWK–Bob Turner and Tom Hickey's airbourne ace–did his best to look like Cary Grant. Flanked by his co-pilots Lucky Lane and Buzz Magee, he adventured in one of the better air series in Dell's *Popular* and *War Comics*. THE WAR BIRD, Tom Sharp of the Eagle Squadron, also charted an exciting course above his competition in *Slam-Bang*.

SPEED BOLTON and STRATOSPHERE JIM AND HIS FLYING FORTRESS were well drawn by Aldon McWilliams as was WINGS WENDALL by Vernon Henkel. His wingmen at Quality were PROP POWERS, LOOPS AND BANKS, and EAGLE EVANS (the original version before Iger used the strip in *Bomber*). Jack Cole's DEATH PATROL was a tongue-in-cheek take-off on The Blackhawk series. Butch, Hank, PeeWee, Slick, and Gramps were ex-convicts hustled by Del Van Dyne to become "The Foreign Legion of the Air". Cole's usual nonsense prevailed.



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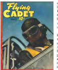
Hawley Publications' *Sky Blazers* featured data and blueprints on planes plus a half dozen WW2 and flying soldier of fortune strips like SKY PIRATES, ARIZONA–The Flying Cowboy, ACE ARCHER, and PYLON PETE. Frank Borth drew Ziff Davis' 1951 flying hero bid, SKYPILOT. It wasn't bad, but not good enough to carry a book on its own.

*Contact* was another all-aviation comic published in 1944. Its lead strip featured THE GOLDEN EAGLE, WW1 ace Dennis Quinn, who piloted a gilded Curtiss P-40E Warhawk into the action. John Giunta's FLAMINGO flew a bat-wing plane in the same book after climbing into a red and orange super hero outfit. War nurse Mary Evans imitated the Black Angel in a strip titled BLACK VENUS elsewhere in the magazine. *Spitfire* was another title that held a hangerful of flying heroes like SPITFIRE SAUNDERS, a sexy girl agent; DROP TOWERS– Airways Adventurer; and FLYIN' FLAGG, an airborne spy-hunter.

In 1948, Edmond Good created BREEZE LAWSON–SKY SHERIFF for the U.S. Publishing Company. Good, who had just finished his term on the Scorchy Smith strip, tried to score with this new high-flying lawman and a cast of characters that included ex-Air Force mechanic, Slick Service. The book folded. In 1955, Good tried again with his own publishing outfit, this time with SKY RANGER–everything was the same except the mechanic, now named Stubby Short. Folded again.



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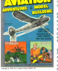
Few aviation strips exploited the pilot as a costumed hero. *Silver Streak* featured another SKY WOLF, an orange-garbed flyer with a blue mask to hide his identity. His plane lethargically sported a wolf's head symbol on each wing.

"Secret aerial operative for the G-Men." SPY CHIEF appeared in the pages of *Punch* and *Dynamic*. His sometimes crimson costume was merely an imitation of Captain Midnight's. Bob Jenney's MASKED PILOT "fought crime on the homefront!" An orange mask (later changed to black) was his only distinguishing characteristic.

CLOUD CURTIS utilized an idea that placed the propeller in the center of the fuselage. He piloted the Golden Bullet "the fastest thing that flies", through the early *Daredevil Comics* with the aid of Jack Binder. Chuck Benson, an American soldier of fortune, donned a red aviator's helmet and became the PHANTOM FALCON in the pages of *Catman Comics*. His fighter plane had a beak and eyes painted on the sides of the engine housing plus a bat-notched tail stabilizer.



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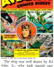
Considerably more appealing was BOMBER BURNS, an air-war strip that ran in all four issues of Hillman's *Victory Comics* starting in August, 1941. After being shot down by the Luftwaffe, American stunt pilot, Jack "Bomber" Burns borrows a Lockheed P-38 Lightning and flies it to the Scottish Highlands. Working day and night, he modifies the plane to suit his requirements and paints it blood red. "There–finished! And boy, is she just what the R.A.F. needs–special superchargers, twelve Browing machine guns, an Oerlikon cannon, and a flame-thrower from an Aussie armored car! I'll use only incendiary bullets, too, and call the plane, The Firebrand!"

Next came the costume–shirt, breeches, and helmet–all Firebrand red, set off with yellow goggles and gloves. "This should make a good disguise! Now for the final touch–calling cards dipped in phosphorous! When they dry out, they'll catch fire! Luftwaffe, here I come!"



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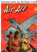
The strip was well drawn by Ed Ashe, Jr., who took special care to render the aircraft with precision and detail. Nathaniel Nitkin's scripts were well-balanced and had the accent on plane name-dropping.

Another quite similar strip appeared in *Tailspin Comics*, November 1944. Though the book contained short documentary-type stories about real life aces like Frank Luke and Claire Chennault, seven pages were incongruously devoted to a costumed flying hero called THE FIREBIRD.

The splash panel looked quite promising. In a spotlight, a beautiful blonde with a machine gun kept the colorful Firebird at bay. Just under the title, a symbolically rendered pheonix breathed a column of flame that set the background afire.

But the story itself was confusing and poorly written.

SKYMAN was one of the most successful avenging aviators in costume. It all began when young Allen Turner was orphaned in a plane crash that took the lives of his parents. His uncle, Peter Turner becomes the lad's advisor and puts him through college. He grows tall, dark and handsome (Tyrone Power again) and becomes an all-around athlete and scholar (bet you knew it all the time). As assistant to his scientist-uncle, he develops a method to halt the blood processes of the body—the Stasimatic Gun.


Air Ace
10¢
No Man Ever Went Through It Before!

The problem of what to do after college is resolved with a simple, "I shall be a scientist-policeman, who will use his powers to prevent and overcome crime!" He chose a patriotic red, white, and blue combination for his identifying colors and found himself billed on the cover of his own magazine in 1941 as "America's National Hero!"

His outfit, which was better designed than most, consisted of a blue cloak and matching helmet with a visor over the eyes. His red shirt was embellished with the symbol of a three-bladed propeller in a circle. Tight, white breeches with a high-belted waist were set off with knee-length black leather boots.

Skyman's method of transportation obviously gave him his name. He flew a red and blue adaptation of Northrop's XB-35 Flying Wing or, more precisely, like the one-man experimental version N-1-M. (The Flying Wing was an aviation sensation in the 40's. The concept eliminated the tubular fuselage by expanding the wings into a single structure similar to a wide boomerang. The XB-35 was a 100-ton bomber, 172 feet from tip to tip, with four 8-bladed contra-rotating propellers. It carried a crew of 15 men and had a range of 10,000 miles. The YB-49, the final experiment with this design, was powered by eight 4,000-pound thrust Allison J-35 jet engines. It proved too unstable to be practical).

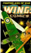
Skyman's plane, literally called The Wing, utilized the magnetic fields which surround the North and South Poles (it was propeller driven in the early adventures). The ship also was capable of hovering steadily in the sky instead of landing when Skyman abandoned it. His method of leaving and entering The Wing made use of a skyhook, a kind of trapeze bar on a flexible cable.

Skyman was created by ace scriptwriter Gardner Fox for Columbia Publications. "Editor Vince Sullivan wanted a playboy-inventor hero. We collaborated on the character," Fox recalls. Originally drawn by Paul Reinman, the skybound swashbuckler premiered in the first issue of Big Shot Comics, May, 1940, and stayed until May 1949, totaling 101 appearances. He also landed in Sparky Watts for a few adventures and four issues of his own book, which were spaced over a period of seven years.

Ogden Whitney envisioned most of Skyman's adventures in a clean, classically simple style that was perfect for the subject matter. Fox's playboy-turned-hero scripts were neat, engrossing dramas that gave the patriotic pilot enough power to take off on a nine year flight through comic chaos.

Bill Barnes
Comics
10 cents

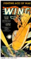
Timely allowed CAPTAIN DARING AND HIS SKY SHARKS to land briefly in the pages of USA Comics, while early National aviators like WING BRADY and THE THREE ACES soon gave way to super heroes who could fly under their own power. Back in 1938, *More Fun* had featured a pair of fearless flyers, GARY HAWKES by Bob Jenney, and THE FLYING FOX by Terry Gilkison. Rex Darrell was The Fox, an aviator who sported a pair of ears on his helmet, in a well-drawn strip that utilized black and white double-tone effects. Gardner Fox tried for another hit in the October 1941 issue of *Star-Spangled* with CAPTAIN X OF THE RAF. But the National skies were too crowded with Superman for readers to notice American newsman, Buck Dare, who flew into combat in a gadgety plastic plane called "Jenny." John Blummer drew all 7 stories.


FIGHTING ACES OF WAR SKIES
WINGS
COMICS

Considerably more significant was another Blummer air strip that soared for nine years—HOP HARRIGAN. Billed as "America's Ace of the Airways", he appeared in comic and text stories in most of National's All-American magazines. Harrigan was a blonde-haired pilot who routed spies, saboteurs, and just plain crooks with the help of his mechanic, Tank Tinker. In *All-American* 25, Hop Harrigan donned a costume fashioned in the super hero tradition and became THE GUARDIAN ANGEL. Three issues later, he gave up the guise and returned to the same old grind.

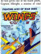
Blummer drew aircraft as little as possible, and even then never with the precision of McWilliams, Kida, or Powell. Strips looked rushed, unfinished, often crude. Yet the strip endured due to a long-running radio series which was adapted from the comic strip with considerably more verve. Columbia's 1946 movie serial didn't hurt either.

Flying heroes were moderately successful in radio series like DON WINSLOW, SMILIN' JACK, JIMMIE ALLEN, and SKY KING, each of which eventually made it into comics and Big Little Books. Yet they were all eclipsed by another ace who beat them out popularity-wise in both radio and comics.


FIGHTING ACES OF WAR SKIES
WINGS

America heard him for the first time on September 30, 1940. A clock tower bell ominously began tolling the hour. Suddenly the roar of a high-powered airplane engine drowned out everything but the announcer heralding (in echo chamber) the coming of CAPTAIN MIDNIGHHHTTTT!

The series began as Army Air Corps Major Steele recalled how he had given one of his finest pilots, Captain Albright, a mission of vital importance during WW1. That mission was to capture enemy mastermind, Ivan Shark, before midnight or the Allies would be defeated. In Air Corps Headquarters, Steele's commanding officer shook his head in dispair.


FIGHTING ACES OF WAR SKIES
WINGS
COMICS
10¢

"Fifteen seconds before twelve—looks like we're all sunk—too much to ask of one man . . ."

Steele interrupted. "Listen, do you hear it?"

"Yes, it's a plane! He's done it! We're saved!"

"And it's just twelve o'clock!" Steele noted.

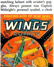
"Yes! And to me, he will always be Captain Midnight!"

Now Steele had a new mission for Albright, to head a special undercover unit called The Secret Squadron. He would be known as Captain Midnight or SS-1. A trio of young sidekicks were his aides: Joyce Ryan was SS-2, Chuck Ramsey was SS-3, Ichabod Mudd was SS-4. Some unit, but to the kid radio audience of 1940, it was perfect.

Their first assignment sent them on the trail of criminal genius, Ivan Shark. He was Professor Moriarity, Dr. No, and Fu Manchu all in one—evil personified. For years he played cat and mouse with the Secret

Squadron aided by his First Lieutenant, Fang, and his daughter, Fury. During the final Captain Midnight broadcast, Shark was eaten by a polar bear while the SS members watched from a plane.

In no time at all, Captain Midnight found his way into the comics. He debuted in *The Funnies* in July 1941, stayed for eight issues then jumped to another Dell title, *Popular*, for three additional adventures. Artists Robert Brice, Dan Gormley and Bob Jenney depicted Midnight in the same fashion that the radio giveaway premiums had: in a wrinkled, brown leather jacket and matching helmet with aviator's goggles. Always present was Captain Midnight's personal symbol, a clock face (with both hands at twelve) which had a pair of wings affixed to the sides.



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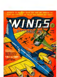
Meanwhile, stuntman Dave O'Brien had worn a similar outfit when he impersonated the airbourne undercover agent in Columbia's 1942 movie serial. A short-run newspaper strip had decked-out the pilot in a blue super-type costume more fitting to his station in life. He was best garbed in Whitman Publications' *Joyce Of The Secret Squadron*. Midnight wore a costume that tied in perfectly with his name— an all-black tight-fitting suit which was unfortunately used only in that book.

Captain Midnight had been created by radio scripters, Robert M. Burtt and Willfred G. Moore, who made writing aviation serials their life's work. They had authored *The Air Adventures of Jimmie Dale* in 1933, adapted *Hop Harrigan* in 1942, and conceived *Sky King* in 1947.

When Fawcett Publications acquired the property,they immediately issued it in its own magazine, *Captain Midnight*, September 1942.

Scripts and art came primarily from the Binder shop with Otto Binder writing. Clem Weisbecker, Lincoln Cross, Leonard Frank, and Al Bare did most of the pencilling and were inked by a score of Binder staffers. Covers occasionally done by Fawcett artist Mac Raboy were inevitably the best.



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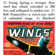
Still more changes in costume were evident. This time around, Captain Midnight was dressed in bright crimson, at first a kind of jacket and loose-fitting jodphurs, then the standard skin-tight outfit that would become his trademark. Designed by Raboy (and inspired by the *Powermen of Mongo* sequence in the Flash Gordon strip), the new costume featured a steel-gray helmet and cowl with matching gloves. A gray stripe down the side of the pants gave them neat, militaristic trim. The winged clock symbol was boldly emblazoned across the chest against a field of red. And, of course, black boots completed the ensemble.

Fawcett's version turned the midnight manhunter into an airbourne arsenal of head-to-toe gadgetry. A special belt in the Batman tradition held: 1) a Doom-Beam Torch—an instrument that threw infra-red rays capable of starting fires (Midnight often used it to brand his symbol into the minds and torsos of his enemies). 2) Swing Spring—a stronger than steel line which extended to 200 feet and collapsed to pocket size. 3) Belt Transmitter—a watch-size radio of unlimited range. 4) Blackout Bombs—small chemical pellets which sprayed intense blackness. 5) Plastic Wire—strong as steel, flexible as rubber. In addition, Captain Midnight's boots contained hidden heel-knives. His final device was the crowning touch: the Gliderchute—wings of super-strong silk which stretched between the extended arms and the body to allow Midnight the semi-power of skydiving. What hero could ask for more?


FIGHTING ACES OF WAR SKIES
WINGS
COMICS
10¢
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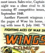
Each of the media in which he appeared, treated Captain Midnight differently. The comic book version tended to play down the Secret Squadron aspect although Joyce and Chuck did make occasional appearances. SS-4, or Ikky as he was affectionately called, became Midnight's sidekick. He acted as mechanic-in-residence and played comic relief man to Midnight's straight heroics. For awhile, Ikky had an alter ego of his own, SGT. TWILIGHT, a junior version of his idol. An air facts filler titled JOHNNY BLAIR IN THE AIR was drawn by Jack Keller in most issues. Sales-wise, Captain Midnight was a close rival to Airboy, running 67 competitive issues, until September 1948.

Another Fawcett wingman made the pages of *Wow* his home, starting with issue 6, July 1942. "Young Mickey Malone cut his eye teeth on a rudder pedal—and he was flying his own plane at an age when most kids are falling off bicycles! But when war came and Uncle Sam needed air power, they said Mickey Malone was too young to fly! They set him to wiping wings—but in his spare time, he built his own secret fighter plane and became that mysterious sky-scourge of the Nazis —THE PHANTOM EAGLE!"


FIGHTING ACES OF WAR SKIES
WINGS
COMICS
10¢
ROLL CALL of the WINGS EAGLES
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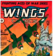
Freckle-faced Mickey did his best to be a scourge in a drab grey and blue outfit but somehow it just didn't work out. It seemed like Fawcett had sent a boy to do a man's work. Written by Otto Binder and drawn by Clem Weisbecker and Marc Swayze among others, the series lacked the punch and imagination that could have put it into the Airboy category. Nevertheless, it lasted until the Fall 1948 issue.

Several other magazines built their contents around flying heroes. Holyoke Publishing started 1942 with their CAPTAIN AERO title. He was another leather jacket/riding breeches aviator with the traditional white scarf and equally traditional, though not memorable, adventures. Charles Quinlan and Len Cole made the covers more exciting than the stories, another comic tradition. Ray Willner's visualization inside was well drawn in the Alex Raymond tradition. SKY SCOUTS, one of the filler strips, was traditionally weak.


FIGHTING ACES OF WAR SKIES
WINGS
COMICS
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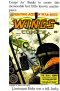
Four Star Publications' CAPTAIN FLIGHT was cast from the same mold; it's only distinguishing characteristic was the heavy panel rules that enclosed the drawings. *Contact* and *Eagle Comics* featured a handful of non-fiction short stories about planes and their pilots. *Flying Cadet* featured photos and text stories in a legitimate magazine-like format, though comic book size. *Aviation Adventures And Model Building* ran KIP CLARK—MODEL BUILDER, along with pages brimming with aviation information.

One of the best of that type of book, *Air Ace*, was published by Street and Smith. In addition to highlighting a wealth of aeronautical facts and fancies often drawn by Ray Evans, it also featured the adventures of pulp pilot BILL BARNES. He became the PHANTOM FLYER for an issue or two before settling down to being a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy. Barnes had flown solo in his own comic book, which had taken off in 1940. Besides highlighting several better than average strips, the magazine set a number of precedents for the air-war comics. It was the first to carry a model building section, complete with plans for do-it-yourselfers. More importantly, it featured Barnes in a pulp text story which ran for more than half the book and was well illustrated with spot drawings. Barnes was particularly interesting when Bob Powell took over as artist. Powell loved drawing planes and lavished an extraordinary amount of accurate detail on the stories.

Powell's early air strips like LOOPS AN' BANKS paved the way for a Harvey Publications' plane filler in *Black Cat Comics* called SHARP STUFF AND THE JUDGE. Still, Powell was only warming up to produce his definitive statement on the flying hero—Chickie Ricks, better known as THE FLYIN' FOOL!

Though Chickie Ricks was no costumed crimebuster, he was equally as far from the Scorchy Smith type aviator. Powell, as both writer and artist, combined the drama of Mr. Mystic, the plot twists of the Man In Black, and the humor of Loops An' Banks to create this memorable but little known masterpiece.



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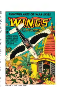
Lieutenant Ricks was a tall, lanky, red-headed pilot who might be best described as the Destry of the Airmen. Instead of a gun, he carried his lunch in his shoulder holster! He had been dishonorably discharged from the U.S. Marines on a false charge and had wandered into the tiny country of T'sao San near Tibet. He was joined by his Marine Sergeant, Gooch, who volunteered to act as his mechanic if any flying jobs were available. No sooner was the partnership made, than they received an offer to transport "flower seeds" out of the country.

Given a beat-up Bristol Beaufort Reconnaissance plane, they took off only to be high-jacked *en route* by Chinese pirates. Forced to land, they were taken to revolution headquarters where they faced the beautiful renegade, Maylene. Brandishing a ten foot bullwhip, she came on like early Dragon Lady, an Yvonne DeCarlo look-alike in a sultry silk gown tantalizingly slit up to mid-thigh. "Ah! The red-headed one is cute! It


FIGHTING ACES OF WAR SKIES
WINGS

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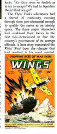
is a pity death is the penalty for dope smuggling!"

After Ricks established his innocence, he completed his rendezvous with the smugglers. But instead of opium, the crates were occupied by Maylene's soldiers. During the ensuing battle, top smuggler Tartar the Terrible kidnaped Maylene and escaped on a horse. Chickie took his chances and tried for a rescue in his plane. "It's a long shot, an' I may kill us all—but I've got to risk it!"

Overtaking the horse in the Beaufort, the intrepid aviator dipped a wing as he flew by, sweeping the huge smuggler over a cliff. Later he asked about the band of smugglers. Maylene filled him in while casually running a hand through her raven locks, "Ah—they were so foolish as to try to escape! We had to liquidate them! Shall we go?"

The Flyin' Fool's adventures had a thread of continuity running through them just substantial enough to qualify the series as an airstrip opera. The three major characters had combined their forces in the first tale, determined to free the country's government of its corrupt officials. A later story exonerated the Flyin' Fool from the charges that had resulted in his court martial.



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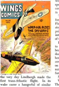
Eventually, he traveled to America in a runaway balloon.

Powell's sense of humor showed through like a beacon, not only in the scripts but in the characterizations. Plots were as tight as Eisner's, often as slapstick as Cole's. Powell had worked with both men. Yet his brand of melodramatic exaggeration was one hundred percent his own. The wide-eyed button-nosed soldier-of-fortune was a welcome relief from the Scorchy/Terry/Winslow imitations that crammed the comic skyways.

As good as the Flyin' Fool was, he was relegated to a position that had him padding *Joe Palooka Comics* from issue 8 to 24, a run which began in February 1947. Harvey Publications had planned to release the Fool as a title by itself, but the book never materialized. Nevertheless, in the history of comics, Chickie Ricks, better known as The Flyin' Fool, is hereby awarded The Distinguished Flying Cross.

Every flying hero, from Chickie to Blackhawk, owed a debt of gratitude to another media which had been first to embrace and exploit the fighter pilot—the pulp magazine. The original air-war pulp, *Air Stories*, was released on May 20, 1927, the very day Lindbergh made the first trans-Atlantic flight. In its wake came a hangerful of similar books with titles like *Sky Birds, Aces, American Eagles, G-8 and His Battle Aces, War Birds, Bill Barnes—Air Adventurer, Sky Devils, Captain Combat, Daredevil Aces, Battle Birds, Sky Fighters, Flying Aces*, and *Wings*.



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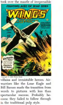
Pulp wordsmiths created a multitude of flying menaces, then destroyed them with the help of tall, handsome warhawks who never missed anything that crossed the range of their gunsights. Typewriter keys thundered like machine gun hammers to produce thrillers like *The Squadron Without A Name, Angel From Hell, The Flying Madmen, Get the First Hun, Death Flies At Twenty Thousand, The Blue Cyclone, Drome of The Damned, The Sky Devil's Spawn, Phantom Aces, The Mark of The Vultures, Raiders of The Death Patrol, Sky Coffins For Satan, Black Wings of The Raven, Curse of The Sky Wolves*, and *The Black Buzzard Flies to Hell*.

When the pulps began to fold in the late 30's and early 40's, comics took over the mantle of irrepressible villains and irresistable heroes. Air-warriors like the Lone Eagle and Bill Barnes made the transition from words to pictures with less than spectacular success. Probably because they failed to follow through in the traditional pulp style.



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Timely relied heavily on the pulp formula. So did Standard. But it was Fiction House who pulled all the stops by literally transferring their pulp titles, characters, and format into the comics almost intact. One of those titles was *Wings*.

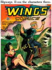
Pulp tactics were heavily applied to covers which threw the reader headlong into the action—explosive, death-dealing, nerve-searing, mind-bending action!!! No Fiction House cover ever posed one of its heroes on the crest of a hill while the setting sun highlighted a hand-held, breeze-furled flag.

No! Never!!

*Wings* covers attacked the reader. Thunderbolts, Wildcats, and Avengers roared right off the paper. Machine guns fired death streams of white hot tracer bullets across Jap wings and into cockpits where Kamakazi pilots snapped back their heads in agony. Dauntlesses and Corsairs streaked out of crimson skyscapes to drop their warheads of destruction on enemy ships that rocked halfway out of the ocean. Zeros and Mustangs competed to see who could perform the tightest Immelmann while their wingmen became flaming comets and died.

Like movie prevues, *Wings* covers condensed the essence of the whole into a single statement. Well-rendered, beautifully designed, vividly colored cover illustrations were inevitably the best part of all Fiction House magazines. Interiors never quite matched the exterior excitement that covers pledged.

Story titles reflected the tone of the pulps too—*Suicide Skyways, TNT For Tokyo, Horsemen of the Sky, V-9 For Vengeance, Sky Express to Hell, Hari-Kari Rides the Skyways.* Even the characters themselves clearly displayed their pulp lineage. Precedents had been set for CAPTAIN WINGS by a pair of pulp aces, Captain Combat and Captain Danger, who both flew for other company's publications.


WINGS
COMICS
CORSAIR of the MONSOON SKIES

When it was decided Fiction House would enter the comic business, President Thurman Scott contacted art studio boss S. M. Iger, who was already producing *Jumbo* for the company. Scott discussed his idea for a *Wings* comic book, gave Iger a half-dozen character names and ideas, then supplemented the whole works with a payload of *Wings* pulps. Using those books as reference, Iger shop artists created a squadron of comic heroes in the pulp image. In fact, pulp writers like Joe Archibald soon began scripting the Fiction House air-war comics.

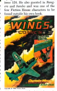
The idea behind Captain Wings was a rather simple one for comic books. Air Force Officer Captain Boggs had his duty to organize squadrons and send his pilots on missions which were often little better than suicide runs. His men viewed him with dislike, sometimes hatred. He was safe at his desk while they died in the enemy skies. Still, someone had to take the responsibility.

To justify his actions (at least to himself), he became the mystery pilot known as Captain Wings. Though he wore no mask or disguise, few of his aces ever suspected he was a man with "two faces, two souls, two names!" He flew a North American P-51 Mustang painted to resemble a huge black and white eagle with feathers stretching to the tips of the wings.

High-flying adventures inevitably utilized the same structured elements: the alter ego device, the business with the other aviators, a beautiful girl with skirts always blown up around her bare thighs, and the obligatory dogfight. Toward the end of his comic career, Captain Wings (the Boggs bit was abandoned after several years) took a tip from the Blackhawk strip and featured arch-villains like Colonel Kamikaze and Mr. Atlantis, which ran as multiple-part serials.

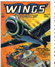
Captain Wings maintained his position as lead strip in *Wings* during his entire run from issue 16 to 118 with scattered appearances thereafter. Though every strip was signed with the house name Major T. E. Bowen, a host of top artists like Gene Fawcette, Artie Saaf, Bob Lubbers, Ruben Moreira and Lee Elias get the credit.

Another *Wings* warhawk, SUICIDE SMITH, competed tenaciously for the title of number one ace in the magazine. He appeared in *Wings* 1, September 1940 and kept flying until the end in 1954 with issue 124. He also guested in *Rangers* and *Jumbo* and was one of the few Fiction House characters to be found outside his own book.



Smith was a leather-jacket-and-goggles-type aviator who shared his thrillers with a sexy British agent named Hinda and a youth named Chuck Hardy. For awhile he was billed as "Blitzkrieg Blaster" and headed a squadron called the Air Commandos. Joe Doolin, Al Hollingsworth, Jack Keller, John Celardo, and Murphy Anderson among others, gave Smith his wings.

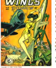
CLIPPER KIRK was another Fiction House flyer who might be called the "Wrong Way" Corrigan of comics. He appeared in issues 1 to 68 in the usual daredevil aviator role. With the next issue (May 1946), he donned a mask, hood and cloak. He became the PHANTOM FALCON when everyone else was taking off their super-duds and preparing for a new trend. In issue 73, he adopted a fake civilian identity—Chet Horne. Who cared? We were watching the girls! His artists included Dick Ayers, Joe Cavallo, Jack Keller, Artie Saaf, Charles Sultan, and others.



Not wanting to risk the possibility of having too little sex appeal in the book, Fiction House editors included JANE MARTIN — WAR NURSE, in the *Wings* line-up. Merely an excuse to supplement the already high content of pin-up pulchritude, it was difficult to determine who enjoyed the stories more, the readers or the artists.

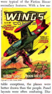
Jane went through a number of careers from nurse to secret agent, but judging by the amount of skin shown, could anyone doubt one of those careers must have been a burlesque queen. To the Fiction House artists the series was known as the Jane Martin "Strip." Nick Cardy, Fran Hopper, and George Evans were among those who handled Jane with tender loving care. Well done, folks!

To satisfy all tastes, GREASE-MONKEY GRIFFIN was tossed in as a token humor strip. However, one thing Fiction House will never be noted for in the chronology of comics is their humor. Griffin exists as visual proof of that thought.



*Wings Comics* provided a landing field for a host of other flying heroes. Kent Douglas, The Englishman; Sandy MacGregor, The Scotsman; and Jimmy Jones, The American combined forces to become the sinister SKULL SQUAD in the first sixty issues. The GHOST PATROL (changed to the Ghost Squadron) were ethereal pilots who took part in the lives of earthly mortals. The stories always involved aviation but the idea was better than the art.

Other *Wings* fillers included THE PARACHUTE PATROL, WING TIPS, THE PHANTOM FALCONS, BUZZ BENNETT, YANK ACES OF WW2, F-4 OF AIR INTELLIGENCE, POWER BURNS, and CALHOUN OF THE AIR CADETS. Most of them lacked any really distinguishing qualities and were typical of the Fiction House secondary features. With a few notable exceptions, the planes were better drawn than the people. Panel layouts were often confusing. Dialogue and captions were frequently heavier than necessary. Sales relied greatly on persuasive and exciting covers drawn by Fawcette, Elias, and Saaf.



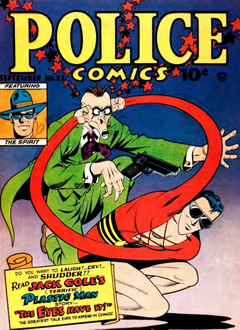
In a way, *Wings* was a barometer which recorded the climate of the era of the flying hero. Toward the end of its run, subtle changes took place in the content of the magazine. Sleek jets replaced the old prop planes. Titles like *Robot Guns* and *Moon Rockets* showed up with increasing regularity. Atomic missles were substituted for manned aircraft.

Suddenly, the day of the airplane was a thing of the past, an anachronism. Airplanes were towed beside the horse drawn carriages and the Model T's.

The era of the flying hero was over. The old pilots retired. Their time had come.

The hanger doors closed.

Forever.


POLICE COMICS
SEPTEMBER No. 22
10¢
FEATURING
THE SPIRIT
DO YOU WANT TO LAUGH?...CRY?... AND SHUDDER??
READ JACK COLE'S TERRIFIC PLASTIC MAN STORY...
"THE EYES HAVE IT!"
THE GREATEST TALE EVER TO APPEAR IN COMICS!

# THE LONG ARM OF THE LAW

"One after another the black-robed figures of the Sinister Six, most dreaded combine in the history of crime, filed into the small, barren room. Some were tall, one or two short, and one was obviously fat and tubby, but the engulfing black robes hid every other hint of their identities. One after another as they entered, the men bent and whispered an identifying number to the tall leader and heard, in return, his own secret number.

"When all were inside, the leader silently swung the great red and yellow door shut and secured it with a massive bar. Now there was neither crack nor keyhole through which their words could filter out. They were locked in a windowless room, bare of any furnishings except table and chairs. Here they met at intervals to plot the crimes that shocked the world.

"The leader rapped the table for attention. 'Not a word from any of you yet,' he ordered, his voice muffled by the thick folds of the black hood. 'You all know the one enemy we fear more than all others together. Not a hint must be whispered until we have made certain he is not hiding here.'

"Silently the six figures turned and began to search every inch of the small room, poking into corners, turning up the rug, feeling inside the lamp globe. They rapped the table and chairs, felt beneath them, and at last sat down, satisfied.

" 'Our arch-enemy can hide in the finest cracks,' the leader said, 'but we are sure now that he has not wormed his way into our midst tonight. He is our deadliest enemy.'

" 'Oh, I don't know,' the fat member hissed. 'How about the brains behind him?'

" 'You mean the F.B.I.?'

" 'Naw,' the tubby one snorted. 'I mean the real brain—his pal, Woozy Winks. Now there's the one you should really fear. He's as deadly as a cobra, as silent as a hawk, as fearless as a lion. . .

" 'Grab him,' the leader broke in harshly. 'He said "you should fear" instead of "we should fear." That means he is not one of us.'

"In a flash, black-clad arms were around the fat figure and black-gloved hands were tearing away the robes. The pale, sweating face of Woozy Winks appeared. Woozy looked around nervously. 'Now you be careful, you guys. We're onto you and if anything happens to me, it'll be plenty tough with you. My pal. . .'

" 'Ha,' snarled the leader as a mutter of rage arose from the others. 'He cannot even find this secret hideout. Nor will he ever find your body, fool. The room is soundproofed. We will each put one bullet through his meddling skull. . .'

" 'I hardly think so,' a voice broke in sharply. As they all peered around wildly, the red and yellow door quivered, bulged and suddenly burst into the room. Long elastic arms flew out and hard fists made blurred arcs as they cracked from muffled jaw to muffled jaw in perfect rhythm.

" 'Plas!' Woozy yelled in relief. 'I knew you wouldn't let me down, ol' pal, ol' friend.' "

PLASTIC MAN (or Plas as he was affectionately called) did more than just not let a pal down.

When trouble threatened, he could change into a crushing steam roller or a tightly closing vise or a huge bowling ball or big butterfly net. If he was stuck in a fog, he'd become a submarine periscope to see over it. If he was sprayed with deadly poison gas, he'd turn into a giant bellows and blow it away. If he was caught in the path of a mobster's careening black limousine, he'd simply stretch his elevator legs so the car could only speed harmlessly through them.

And, besides all these, he did one thing more. He completely shattered the super-hero tradition that had previously defied parody and satire. Plastic Man was all parody and satire.

Captain Marvel had its ample supply of outrageous humor, true. But Plastic Man veered from the outrageous to the uproarious. His highly graphic low-jinks set off tremors not only on the laugh meter but on the sales meter too.

The sultan of stretch had shaped up to become an immediate success and a fun partner in the company of Superman, Batman, and Captain America. Plastic Man was a genuine original.

The saga of the unstable sleuth began in August 1941 in the pages of the first issue of *Police Comics*. The splash panel symbolically showed Plas and a quartet of hoods in a good vs. evil situation against a silhouette of the city. He would basically retain the same costume throughout his long career—a crimson leotard (sleeveless in the beginning) laced across the chest and separated by a wide belt of alternating black and yellow stripes. He also wore a pair of black boots, serrated at the top along the leg, which would soon be discarded for bare feet (though toes were always mysteriously missing!).

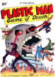
The story opens on a gang of thugs robbing the Crawford Chemical Works. "Here's the swag! A hundred grand! Hot dig!" Luckily the dialogue is interrupted by a guard who shoots the tall safecracker dressed in a red and black pin-striped suit. To make matters worse, a vat of acid spills on the crook.

"Hey, ya putrid punks! WAIT UP!!" he cries, acid dripping from his hook nose and lantern jaw. "Adios, Eel!" comes the reply, as his partners drive away in a yellow sedan.

Cursing them venomously, the Eel staggers through the city, across a swamp, and up a mountainside, where he collapses. (Who wouldn't?) He awakes to find himself in a bed, being served by a monk.

"You are in Rest-Haven, son!"

"In Heaven?? Me? Quit the kiddin! Where I'm goin' the coldest day is



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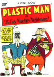

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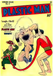

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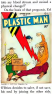
300 degrees above!"

The monk explains how he found The Eel on a mountainside trail and took him in. The Eel is moved by the gesture and makes a confession. "Well, y' see, my folks died when I was ten, leaving me alone in the world! I tried to work hard but people kept pushing me around—*always pushing*!! Until finally I got tired of it and started pushing them around!"

In the following tilted panel, Eel O'Brien admits he's been given a "new slant" on things. He discovers just how much of a slant in the following sequence, for as he stretches, his arms elongate to triple their normal length. *"GREAT GUNS!! I'M STRETCHIN' LIKE A RUBBER BAND!!"*

Puzzled, amused, and making faces in a mirror, the Eel realizes he can reshape his body to any conformation, stretching it indefinitely. "The acid! That's it! Must've gotten into my blood stream and caused a physical change!!"

On the basis of that prognosis, Eel O'Brien decides to salve, if not save, his soul by joining the other side. "What a powerful weapon this would be . . . *against crime!* I've been for it long enough! Here's my chance to atone for all the evil I've done!!"



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Several days later, the Eel recovers completely and leaves the sanctuary. His first mission, "to clean up the rats who deserted me! But first, I'll need a costume of rubber!"

The Eel's return surprises his gang and they promise to cut him in on a bank job the following day. He accepts and agrees to drive the getaway car. But during the robbery, he deserts the car and enters the building. "They've gone! Now to strip to my new costume and change my face!"

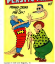
Inside, the crooks are escaping with a satchel of money. Suddenly, they're confronted by a pair of giant hands reaching out on extended arms from the top of an elevator shaft. But, their gunfire keeps the red-garbed intruder at bay. He flattens himself into a rug, waits for the gang to come down the stairway, and envelops them as they run by. In the ensuing battle, Plas is pushed from the roof and performs his first rubber ball stunt, bouncing harmlessly off the sidewalk.

The gang returns to the car to find the Eel waiting. Tearing away from the scene, he laughs at their description of his alter ego, simultaneously stretching his arm around the car to enter the opposite window and collar the gang. After depositing them at the local police station, he drives off, intending to continue his role as an undercover agent. "Now to return the money! I never knew fighting for the law could be so much fun!"

Readers never knew fighting for the law could be so much fun either. Never, that is, until Plas used his elevator legs to get a birds-eye view of things, catching caricaturistic crooks by stretching his long arm of the law, and dodging bullets by becoming a human pretzel. In due course, Plas became an official G-Man.

When thugs descended on him, it was inevitable that moments later one of them would leave to tell the boss that they had finally captured Plastic Man. But when the flying fists cleared, the hoods would discover they had been raining blows down on one of their own men, who was now wearing only his shorts. "Hey, Plastic Man got away in Shorty's clothes!"

Plas would escape the certain doom of being pushed off the top of a building with his all-time favorite trick of rolling himself into a ball and bouncing away. The synthetic sleuth turned up everywhere as everything: a lasso, a sling-shot, a bird-cage, a parachute, a boat, a chair, a table, a tight-rope, a foot-stool, a jack-in-the-box, a slide, a hammock, a hoop or a kite. Crooks often mistook him for the loot and stole him.



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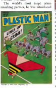
While most comic characters went through a succession of changes over the years, Plastic Man would remain virtually the same as he began. Of course, the Eel O'Brien identity was dropped and Plas became Plas all the time. He discovered he was invulnerable to bullets, which merely pincushioned harmlessly against his elastic body.

Plas' only weakness was his susceptibility to extreme heat or cold. A roaring inferno would turn him into a soft, soggy, helpless super-hero. A deep freeze could stiffen him up like a pair of long-johns on a wash-line in the middle of winter. Crooks often took advantage of his infirmities by stuffing him in steam rooms or refrigerated lockers. But Plas would always escape, usually with the help of his sidekick.

Or, more precisely, his co-star WOOZY WINKS.

The world's most inept crime-smashing partner, he was introduced in *Police 13*, November 1942. It all began with Woozy fishing a fellow misfit out of the drink. In gratitude for saving his life, the man (a mystic and a soothsayer) granted Woozy the power of nature's protection. It all meant that should danger threaten, an earthquake, a tornado, or a lightning storm would protect him.



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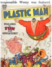
Woozy pondered if he should use the gift for good or evil purposes and flipped a coin to determine the answer. *Crime won!*

But Woozy hadn't reckoned with Plastic Man who soon had him in jail. Yet no jail could hold Woozy, so Plas made a deal. If he promised to go straight, Woozy could help Plas in his fight against crime. They joined forces and became partners. Though Woozy's powers diminished and were finally lost over the years, the two characters launched a long-term assault on a chaotic cosmos of comic criminals.

Some of their adversaries had physical endowments as unique as Plastic Man's own. Sadly Sadly's face was so pathetic no one could refuse him anything. The Figure was so voluptuous no one could refuse her anything either.

In virtually every story and on every cover from *Police 13* on, the irrepressible Woozy was featured.


PLASTIC MAN
10¢
PARADES for FUN and ADVENTURE!

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A deadringer for Hugh Herbert (or Alfred Hitchcock), he forever sported the same straw hat, green trousers and chartreuse polka-dot shirt. They were inseparable—their Abbott and Costello relationship making the strip work. One without the other would have left the stories too predictably flat, too structurally hollow. Stumbling, bumbling, mumbling Woozy Winks was the perfect Dr. Watson to Plas' slinky, cerebral Sherlock.

Their cover billing laid it on the line, "a rib-tickling team of crime-busters!"—as this story, *Plastic Nemesis*, from *Plastic Man* 1 (Summer, 1943) amply proved:

Four big closed cars, loaded with men, arrived at the four entrances to the Langford Trust Company at the same instant. Out of them poured masked, armed figures. They filled the lobby and the offices in a twinkling.

"This is a stickup! Employees line up right—customers left!"

A cashier whipped open a drawer where lay a pistol—one of the thugs fired a tommy gun, and the cashier subsided. A customer reached for a telephone—another thug leaned over to swing a blackjack, and the customer fell.

The gangsters, working furiously but with amazing discipline, stripped tills, drawers and floor safes of money. But the tall, sinewy man in a full-face mask who seemed to be commander of the raid did not even glance at the heaps of money. He clamped his hard hand on the shoulder of the executive vice-president, Dawson.

"The Kimripore jewels! At once, or—"

Dawson shook his head. "I don't know what you mean."

"Stop lying. The Rajah of Kimripore sent his crown treasures to America, as security for a loan of millions. Plastic Man and that little screwball Woozy Winks brought them overseas—don't you think the underworld heard how they smashed six attempts to steal the jewels? And we know they're in your vaults."

SEPTEMBER No. 13
PLASTIC MAN
10¢
GAMBLES
DEATH
MR. HAZARD!

He thrust a pistol against Dawson's ribs. The vice-president led him down a flight of stairs and unlocked a barred door.

"There," Dawson pointed. "In that vault! In a big cowhide suitcase . . ."

"Open the vault." The masked man prodded him with the gun. "Quick, or I'll make you look like a cribbage board!"

Dawson spun the dial, pulled open the great door. Inside stood a dingy-looking suitcase. It's label said PLASTIC MAN.

"Bring it out. Open it." The vice-president did so, disclosing a glittering mass of rubies, diamonds, amethysts, emeralds—the ransom of an emperor. At a motion from his captor, he shut the case again and handed it to the masked man.

His only reply, and reward, was a bullet through the heart. The raider chief hurried upstairs.

"Clear out!" he barked at his men. They sped out to their cars and away. The entire raid had taken less than ninety seconds.

"Cops coming?" asked the driver of the biggest car as he headed his vehicle for the suburbs.

The thug in the seat beside him glanced back. "Yeah! But they took after the other boys, left us alone."

"I fixed that," spoke the leader, from between his two companions in the rear. He had taken off his mask revealing the sharp, shrewd features of Bronty Breen, current Public Enemy No. 1. "Just before we went in, I called police and FBI offices. Said the Langford Trust was being raided—and told which way the other three cars would head."

"Police!" echoed his companions. "FBI! And you tipped them off?"

"Sure. While they're busy scooping up the others, we get clear away. And," Bronty's toe tapped the suitcase, "only five of us left to split the jewels, huh?"

He grinned, but nobody grinned back. A lieutenant gazed from the rear of the car. "If you called FBI, Bronty, that brings Plastic Man into the case!"

Bronty shuddered, but shrugged it off. "Not a chance! He's on leave of absence, after bringing these jewels from Kimripore—"

"Look!" interrupted the other thug.

They all looked back.

From the top of a tall building two great red streamers darted out and down, like interminable, deadly snakes—each toward a different street. Down and down the red streamers extended—story after story—to the sidewalk level—there came a sound of crash and commotion.

"That was Plastic Man!" breathed one of the five. "He reached down with both arms—snagged two of the cars at once!"

MARCH No. 16
PLASTIC MAN
10¢
Finds
MONEY
means
TROUBLE!

"Speed up," growled Bronty to the driver. "We're blowing town."

Plastic Man, gaunt, crimson-clad, enigmatic behind his dark goggles, sat in a little cellar room of FBI headquarters. Woozy, podgy and deceptively dull-faced, lounged beside him. Opposite them was one of the captured thugs.

"I ain't talking," the thug said for the hundredth time, "and you FBI jerks ain't gonna batter me into it."

"Who said anything about battering?" inquired Plastic Man silkily. "I wouldn't lay a finger on you."

He waggled a finger to emphasize. The finger grew a yard long for a moment, then subsided.

"He don't scare easy Plas," offered Woozy. "I knew him back when I was outside the law. Kittens, they called him—because nothing scares him but a cat—"

"So?" muttered Plastic, and smiled. His hand lifted to his face, swept across it. His body seemed to grow plumper and at the same time lither. His legs doubled strangely, the feet were paws. His ears turned pointy, whiskers were plainly sprouting—

"Get away from me!" Kittens suddenly quavered.

Plastic Man was Plastic Man no more. The lithe, furry creature he had become jumped gracefully down from the chair and strolled forward toward the captive. "Meow?" it said.

"Get that cat out of here!" begged Kittens, cowering. "Listen, I'll tell anything—it was Bronty Breen who planned the raid—"

"Where did he go with the jewels?" demanded Woozy.

"I don't know—I swear I don't! we were directed to head east—the other two carloads you and the cops grabbed went west and south—but Bronty's car had its own orders—"

"Which means it went north," said Plastic Man, who had become himself again with a little wriggle and a rubbery snap. "Tell the turnkey to put him away, Woozy. We're going north ourselves."

Bronty Breen's hideout had been prepared months before. It looked no more than a half-ruined shack among trees at the end of a country road, but this was only a modest topping to a vast underground lair, strongly fortified, stocked with provisions and weapons, with at least three secret entrances.

In the main cellar-room, Bronty and his four surviving thugs gathered around the open suitcase.

"Look at them pretty gimmicks!" exulted Potsy, the driver, picking up a ruby as big as a walnut. "What a game of marbles a guy could play with them! And we divide five ways."

POLICE
COMICS
10¢
OCTOBER No. 23

"Not that simple, Potsy," said his chief quietly.

"Why there's five of us—"

"And four of you are only stooges. I'm boss, I get eighty percent. You others, five percent each."

"I'm satisfied," nodded one thug. "After all, we picked up plenty of cash in the Langford Trust. I got a pocketful."

"I'm not satisfied," growled Potsy, and a gun came out from under his coat. "If—"

A buzzer sounded somewhere above.

"The electric-eye signal," snapped Bronty. "Somebody's prowling around. Two of you—Potsy, you and Banjo—slide out among the trees and hook in whoever it is. Quick!"

The two designated slipped away down a tunnel, up through a hidden burrow and away among the trees. The three thugs who waited soon heard a knock at the upper door. Bronty, covered by tommy guns in the hands of his lieutenants, opened it. Potsy stood there, with a prisoner bound and crestfallen—a pudgy, dull-faced prisoner—

"That's Woozy, Plastic Man's sidekick!" exclaimed Bronty.

"I know," Potsy nodded. "We found him nosing around. Banjo's out there, trying to sneak up on Plastic Man."

POLICE
COMICS
10¢

"That's more than a one-man job," said Bronty. "Go back, Potsy, and take Spike here with you."

The two men left, and Bronty faced the captive. "How did you track us, Woozy?"

"As soon as we knew you'd gone north, we just studied the marks of tire-treads," replied the little fellow. "The other cars all had new black market tires of the same brand—so we figured you'd have 'em, too. And we followed you here."

"Woozy," said Bronty, "you weren't always a dope. Forget the law and Plastic Man. Help us snare and finish him. I'll cut you in on the Kimripore jewels—"

A knock. Banjo was back.

"We got Plastic Man!" he cried. "Those new explosive bullets did the trick! And Potsy and Spike are burying him!"

Bronty faced the worried Woozy. "Forget what I said. We don't need you now."

"No cut of the jewels?" suggested Woozy.

"The only cut you get is across the throat," said Bronty. "Bring him downstairs."

In the room with the jewels, Bronty nodded to Banjo. "Finish him quick—Hey, what—you're *changing*!"

"I've been changing all day," said Banjo, who ran a hand over his face, twitched out of his garments and stood up as Plastic Man. "First I captured Potsy and Banjo and came back as Potsy. Then I grabbed Spike—the FBI boys have him halfway back to town—and came back as Banjo. I wanted to be sure the jewels were safe—"

Bronty drew his gun. Plastic's fist shot halfway across the room, knocking the gang chief sprawling. Then, like a rubber ball, Plastic Man bounded upon the remaining thug. "Snap that suitcase shut, Woozy, and get it out of here!"

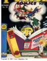
Bronty staggered into one of the hidden passages, shaking his head to clear it. He heard sounds of conflict outside that died away. He dared peep out.

Everyone was gone—but not everything. An object still lay in the center of the floor—

"The suitcase!" he breathed. "Woozy didn't get it, after all!"

Gun in one hand, he ran to the treasure, lifted it, and slid into another secret passage. He found a door, entered, locked the door behind him. He set down the suitcase, laid his gun on top.

There were no windows, no ventilators, no entrances but the locked door. Plastic Man might follow—surely would follow. But Bronty would be ready. From his pocket he drew a vial of powerful corrosive acid. Carefully he poured it into the keyhole.



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"Let him come in," he muttered. "That'll eat him down to the bones, if he has any bones in that rubberized carcass—"

"Isn't this cozy, all alone together?" said a voice he knew.

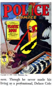
He whirled and looked at the suitcase on which his gun lay.

The suitcase itself, lifted a head. The luggage straps unfolded from around it, became legs. The handle lengthened into an arm, and took the gun in its hand. Plastic Man stood up.

"Just another of my disguises, Bronty," he said as the tale ended.

Plastic Man was the creation of Jack Ralph Cole, one of the most extraordinary writer/artist talents in the comic book business. Born on December 14, 1914, in New Castle, Pennsylvania, he was the son of Delace and Cora Belle Cole, and was raised between two brothers and two sisters.

Cole's mother, once a schoolteacher, was a quiet, sympathetic woman whose family was her first concern. His father, however, had a gregarious, hearty nature and an irresistable bent towards show business. Though he never made his living as a professional, Delace Cole was a born showman, a song-and-dance man of the old school, a trooper who was constantly organizing charity drive shows and performances for veterans.



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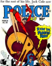
Jack Cole grew up under the influence of comic strips like Elzie Segar's Thimble Theatre, Rudolph Dirks' Captain and The Kids, and George McManus' Bringing Up Father. Their uninhibited slapstick fired Cole's imagination to the point where he'd doodle endlessly in the margins of his schoolbooks, much to the disapproval of his teachers. Silent films added even more fuel to his growing enchantment of visual storytelling (even though he had to read all the titles aloud to his kid brother, Bob).

Cole began to draw, sometimes copying the comics, sometimes making up his own. More often than not, he was dissatisfied with the results. Then he found an advertisement that promised: "YOU can be a real cartoonist and SELL your drawings!"

Something clicked!

It was then that Cole dreamed a dream so personally compelling that it took precedence over everything—for the rest of his life. Jack Cole saw himself as a cartoonist—just like Segar or Dirks—appearing in newspapers every day, making the world smile. He set about to make it happen.



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Cole spent the next few days waiting for the right moment to ask his father, who was in the dry goods business, to enroll him in the cartoon correspondence course. The answer he was afraid of came—"No!"

But Jack Cole was not about to let a little thing like a "no" stop him. He needed cash—and found the answer to his problem, just like thousands of other kids, in his lunch money. If, Cole reasoned, he combined that, his allowance, and anything else he could earn around the neighborhood, he could probably send for the lessons himself.

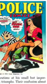
He solved the lunch problem with typical Cole resourcefulness. Every night while the family was asleep, he'd tiptoe down from his third floor bedroom to the kitchen. There he'd make sandwiches, wrap them carefully, and take them back upstairs. How to get them out without anyone getting wise? Believe it or not, Cole used the old hollow book trick.

By scrimping and saving, he eventually had enough money saved to subscribe to the mail order art course from the Landon School of Cartooning. It was the turning point in Cole's life. He studied each lesson expeditiously, and turned in an admirable series of sample cartoons. The urge to see his material in print culminated in Cole's own underground school newspaper, *The Scoop*.

Published anonymously (and printed secretly on his dad's mimeo machine), Cole parodied the faculty of New Castle High with cartoons and needled his classmates with all kinds of gossip. In fact, a student was expelled because of an article in the phantom paper. Cole printed a retraction. His father locked up the mimeograph.

Besides cartooning, Cole also was quite adept at cabinetmaking. He remodeled his bedroom and in so doing, included several hidden panels. In one of them (a sliding bookcase), he rigged up some equipment that enabled him to tap into the telephone lines. Cole delighted in listening in on his sister's conversations with her boyfriend, then telling the family about it. When the phone company investigated the tap, even they couldn't locate it.

Cole's approach to the subject of humor, in drawing or in practical joking, was one-of-a-kind. Like many artists, he was a dreamer, rather shy and introverted. His family and friends often found it difficult to understand his moods—sudden depressions and equally sudden exhilarations at his small but important triumphs. Their confusion about his personality, which dwelled half in the realistic world and half in a make-believe world, led to frustration and often anger.



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School, family and his own gnawing wanderlust prompted Cole to make a decision—to leave home. But even as a boy, Cole was unusual, and apt to do extraordinary things. So, in 1932, he quit school, got on his bicycle, and began a 7,000 mile trip that would take him across the country to California.

The trip suited Cole well; he had a tall, lanky 6'3" frame and was rather athletic in a Jimmy Stewartish kind of way. He would make a name for himself as a teenage Marco Polo, conquer the country on a bicycle, and learn much about himself in the process. He gave his own account of the story like this:

It was spring; the calendar read a quarter past 1932. Grass grew green. Birds warbled as they watched our old maple tree slowly unclench her fist-like buds into countless emerald leaves. And along with the resurrection of vegetation there came to me an irresistible desire to go somewhere—anywhere.

I had hoped to see the Olympic Games being held that summer at Los Angeles, California. In fact, Dick—likewise suffering from wanderlust—and myself were already rounding out plans for making the journey via Model T; then Dick's family moved from town. I could not afford to buy and operate an automobile alone, so I had to find a cheaper mode of transportation.

"Can I hitchhike out, dad?" I asked.

His answer was emphatically no.

Finally, as a last hope, I sought permission to go by bicycle, and, *mirabile dictu*, the necessary permission was granted.

By July 11, all was in readiness: bicycle overhauled, route mapped out, equipment gathered, clothing packed. The following morning, at dawn, my journey began, and, glancing back over my shoulder, I said good-by to the old homestead, to New Castle, and later in the day, to Pennsylvania itself. Like all greenhorns, I was sure that the more the equipment, the better the trip. In addition to the clothing I wore, my outfit consisted of: two blankets, a pup tent, raincoat, three pairs of socks, underclothing, bathing suit, sweater, bicycle tools, medicine kit, sewing kit, canteen, cooking utensils, food, Bible, flashlight, paper, pencils, towels, soap, and a mouth organ.

POLICE
10¢
IS PLASTIC MAN

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Fourteen hours of continuous pedalling, that first day, caused severe cramps in both legs. This was my first time on a bike in two years. I crawled off and set up camp beside a cemetery. Then, after preparing a slipshod meal, I fell into undisturbed sleep. The first hundred miles proved to be by far the most trying. Each succeeding day became less and less tedious, and correspondingly more enjoyable.

Near Indianapolis, Bessy, my trusty steed, began to wheeze and buckle slightly at the knees, protesting such an excess in luggage; so I gathered all unnecessary articles, including the raincoat, and shipped them home C.O.D.

Up at daybreak each morning, I would cook breakfast, pack up, and set out, stopping only for an occasional snack, or perhaps to fill my radiator at some wayside pump. I was often able to buy from a farmer a quart of milk for two cents, or half a dozen eggs for a nickel. Thus living was inexpensive. My greatest extravagance was a quart of ice cream a day. Old Sol sang daily to the tune of ninety degrees in the shade. To find camping sites was no problem; fields were plentiful, or sometimes a considerate farmer would permit the use of his hayloft. The most preferable spot, though, was to be found near tourist camps, where I stood the chance of getting a refreshing shower bath if the proprietor happened to be in a congenial mood.

POLICE
COMICS
AUGUST
10¢
PLASTIC MAN

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One week on the road took me to St. Louis, Missouri. Two days later, while stopping for the night near a swamp, I was awakened from sleep to find my face a mass of stinging, swelling welts. Mosquitoes—hundreds of them—were attacking me savagely from every angle, and I was forced to spend the remainder of the night with a wet towel over my face, leaving only my nose protruding.

Mother and dad had promised to write often, so the first thing I did, upon reaching Kansas City the next day, was to make a bee line for the post office—which was closed. This meant an overnight stay. A fifty-cent hotel furnished sleeping accommodations. Here I received the first glimpse of myself in a mirror since starting. I could hardly recognize myself! The mirror reflected a six-foot lad whose 150 pounds had diminished to 135 pounds in ten days (this explained the sudden slack in his trousers). His face was swollen abnormally—one eye completely closed—from mosquito bites; broiling sun had chipped off most of the top soil from his nose, leaving it a brilliant crimson hue; his head, which a friend had graciously shaved just before the trip, was sunburned to the peeling point.

I had left a loaf of bread on the bicycle that night, wrapped in my swimming suit (you'd be surprised how a damp suit maintains the freshness of bread), and in the morning, when I went to get it, I discovered that rats had completely demolished both bread and water togs. But rivers were becoming scarce, so the loss was not tragic.

Kansas plains offer a veritable paradise for cyclists. With an assisting breeze, it was not at all impossible to cover 150 miles a day. Dodge City, Kansas, proved to be—to me at least—the doorway to the romantic West. Here I saw with wonder my first cactus plant, rattlesnake, horned toad, and prairie dog. But soon these sights became commonplace.

POLICE
COMICS
DECEMBER
10¢
WOOZY
PLASTIC MAN

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Although most of the roads were in good condition, there were some whose construction plainly vetoed bicycle traveling, those of gravel or sand. Pedalling through sand is like tramping through deep snow sans snowshoes.

About Bessy: she was the height of inconsideration and indiscretion. While descending a precipitous mountain pass in Colorado, I naturally applied the brakes. Instantly everything collapsed. The repair job that followed bit so mercilessly into my pocketbook that a request for currency was promptly rushed eastward.

On this same day, near sundown, I was idling along at a leisurely pace, when all at once a loud report sounded, and simultaneously a bullet whistled directly over my head. About one hundred feet away stood an intoxicated Mexican, gun in hand, evidently enjoying the time of his life, but my sense of humor was not keen enough to appreciate such a joke. Bessy certainly could cover ground with the proper incentive—those succeeding twenty miles passed in a blur.

Nights in New Mexico's highlands are filled with enchantment. The bright moon shines down upon white mountain peaks; the air is cool and refreshing. Occasionally a distant coyote interrupts the stillness with an unearthly howl. To counter-balance the beauty, though, were steep and snake-like roads, opposing my efforts of shin with all the forces of gravity. Travel was consequently slowed down.

Flat tires? By the good grace of Lady Luck, only once did this happen. Four miles west of Flagstaff, Arizona, a sharp piece of gravel accomplished the deed. Instead of back-tracking four miles, I plunged on ahead, hoping to buy a new tire at the next town. To my chagrin, I straggled 150 miles—walking fifty and receiving a lift for the remainder to Kingman, Arizona, before finally locating a place where tires were sold.

Between Kingman and Los Angeles lie 250 miles of continuous desert, and the next day, when I reached Needles, California, situated in the very heart of it all, the temperature registered 120 degrees in the shade. After dining on ice cream, I rode out into the sweltering heat. Ten-miles up-grade I pumped. Not a house, tree, nor even a signboard. My head began to reel and it seemed difficult to breathe, so, pouring the entire contents of my canteen over my body, I turned about and scurried back to Needles. I started out again after dark.

POLICE
COMICS
NOVEMBER
10¢
PLASTIC MAN
MAD MEANER
CITY OF THE FUTURE

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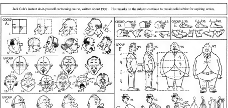
All through that night and the following day I rode, and reached Los Angeles about sundown. Forty hours without sleep! I went to bed at once.

The 3,000-mile journey had been

Jack Cole's instant do-it-yourself cartooning course, written about 1937. His remarks on the subject continue to remain solid advice for aspiring artists,


GROUP A.
GROUP B.
GROUP C.
GROUP D.
GROUP E.
GROUP F.
1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10.
11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20.
21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27.
31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37.
38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43.
44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52.
⅓ ⅓ ⅓
½ ½

Have you a desire to cartoon? Then you can cartoon! Let me stamp this indelibly upon your minds. YOU CAN CARTOON! It is immaterial whether or not you are endowed with natural artistic ability; if you but possess the will and determination you can learn to draw just as you have learned to write. Every cartoonist in the country has had nothing more to begin with than you or I—merely a desire. I cannot guarantee to make you a success as a cartoonist—no one can do that—but I can tell you how you may make yourself one.

The beginner's equipement need not be extravagant: a ruler, eraser, black India ink, pen, pencil, brush, and a few pen points constitute the only necessary articles. (I use a Gillott's No. 1158 or a Hunt No. 153 pen point mostly. But what suits one may displease another, so try out several different types and select the ones you like best). A drawing board and "T" square are also desirable. Any paper with a hard, smooth surface will do for ink work.

Let us first take up the construction of the head. Ability to caricature is the ability to recognize outstanding physical features of the face, and then to emphasize these features by exaggeration. To draw a side view, the easiest process is to construct a square, bisecting it with horizontal and vertical lines. No. 1 on the accompanying chart illustrates this step. Position of the eye is always as shown in No. 1, on the horizontal guide line. Place the ear at the intersection of the two guidelines. Approximately halfway between eyebrow and point of chin (No. 2), the nose terminates. Now draw the mouth and chin, placing the mouth about one-third the distance from nose to chin. Complete the outline of the head (No. 3) and block in hair. After you have finished the sketch, apply pen lines and erase pencil lines (No. 4).

Variations of this rule are quite numerous, however. If the subject is to be a fat person, place the horizontal guideline slightly below (No. 6) the center of the square. A child should have a very prominent forehead to counterbalance its receding chin. Use a rectangle instead of a square (No. 7) when drawing this persons.

Due to bisymmetrical structure, front view drawings are more difficult than side view drawings. No. 11 shows an oval drawn to represent the intended shape of the head. Like the square, it is bisected vertically and horizontally. Place eyes on the horizontal line, about the width of one eye apart. Care should be exercised not to get one eye larger than or below the level of the other. Mistakes of this sort tend to brand a cartoon as amateurish. The same applies to the size and location of the ears. Guide lines are used as shown in No. 11, to obtain even proportion in eyes and ears. Nose, mouth, and chin are drawn next (No. 12), then the hair is outlined (No. 13). No. 14 shows the completed head. Compare Nos. 15 through 20, for relative position of eyes and shape of heads.

Most widely used in cartooning is the "angle" view—a combination front and side view. No. 21 shows how guide lines are arranged to aid placement of features. Follow steps 22, 23, and 24 closely in working out your own drawings. Remember that only one ear is visible in most angle views. This is also true in angle views from the rear (No. 29). In drawing a direct rear view, avoid a "door-knob" effect by extending the neck lines clear to the hair, instead of chopping them off at the bottom of the head (No. 30).

For practice work, draw a group of funny noses, mouths, whiskers and hair: then draw faces, using a different combination of features each time. Draw, draw, draw!

Without expression, a cartoon lacks the punch to put it over. Notice the different expressions in groups B and C; memorize the various lines that govern them. An excellent idea is to clip from old magazines and newspapers as many different types of faces and expressions as possible. Keep these in a scrapbook, with name of expression and type of face written under each. Study them; use them as a guide to making up your own cartoons.

Another ideal way of learning expressions is to make faces in the mirror. I used to stand in front of my dresser for hours, laughing, pouting, frowning, sighing, etc. all the while recording on paper the characteristic wrinkles.

Group D demonstrates the structure of hands. Pay strict attention to the relative length of fingers and placement of thumb. Look at your own hands—draw them in different positions. Always employ the five pointed object (No. 31) in drawing hands.

Logically following hands are feet. The use of a triangle, such as the one pictured in No. 38, greatly facilitates in the learning of the correct shape of the foot. You may encounter some difficulties with hands and feet, but constant practice will eliminate these.

After you have mastered the head, hands, and feet, learn to draw comic bodies. No. 44 gives the proportions of a comic figure in side position. Now, in actual anatomy, the head is a fraction less than one-seventh of the entire body, but in a cartoon, the ratio is reduced to one fifth or one sixth, depending upon the type of figure to be drawn. Observe that the legs of a normal man (No. 44) are as long as the torso.

Never start the sleeve of a coat at the neck; begin it about one-third down the body, as No. 44 shows. Locate elbows and knees at the middle of arms and legs respectively.

For figures in action, the skeleton method eliminates a lot of guesswork. If you follow the process described in Nos. 48, 49, and 50, it won't be long before you can draw a comic body in many positions. Memorize the various wrinkles in the clothing of figures in group F. Nos. 51 through 54 show how to draw skeletons in action, and how to form the body around them.

That is the surest—and the easiest—way to draw human figures.

### ODDS AND ENDS

1. Leave plenty of border around drawings—at least an inch at both sides and top, and two inches at the bottom.
2. Carelessness has no place in the makeup of a cartoonist. I sometimes spend 8 to 10 hours on one drawing before I am satisfied.
3. Draw mostly about subjects familiar to you.
4. Ideas to be illustrated should never offend races, religions or persons (especially those with physical afflictions).
5. Bear in mind that most reproductions of cartoons in magazines and newspapers are about one fourth their normal size, so draw your pen lines twice as thick as you normally do.
6. Keep your old drawings for comparison with later ones, so that you can tell how much progress has been made.
7. Get plenty of action into cartoons.
8. Be original in everything you do—never copy.
9. Practice making pen lines until you can draw without the slightest jerkiness in your pilot hand.
10. Get your work published somewhere, if possible, as reproduction will enable you to find your weak points more readily.

Remember YOU CAN CARTOON!

covered in 23 days, averaging from 100 to 150 miles a day. Bessy was so utterly fatigued from such an ordeal, that, like the one hoss shay, she simply went to pieces. There was nothing to do but abandon her, close friends though we had been. (Author's note: Cole actually threw Bessy in the Pacific Ocean).

No story is complete without a certain degree of pathos. The sad part of my story is that after coming this far for the express purpose of seeing the Olympics, I did not have enough money to gain admittance. I remained in Los Angeles a week in a cheap hotel.

When my clothes from home arrived, I hitchhiked to Long Beach and spent a most enjoyable week at the home of friends. Early one morning we drove up into the San Bernardino mountains, to try our luck at gold mining, and we did manage to pan out about twenty-five cents worth of the metal.

I had relatives living near San Francisco, so I decided to pay them a visit next. To be suddenly catapulted from the role of poor vagabond to fêted guest is bewildering. Tennis, theaters, motoring trips, operas, swimming, boat rides, field clubs—all wedged tightly into two weeks, left me nearly breathless.

In spite of the hospitality showered upon me, I began now to want to go home. When I disclosed my intention of hitchhiking the distance, my uncle thrust two ominous thumbs downward and offered—or rather insisted upon—a bus ride home at his expense. When an irresistible force meets an immovable object, the only satisfactory solution is a compromise, which, in this instance, took the form of a new bicycle.

Late Bessy's many faults were impressed upon me anew on that seventh day of September as I rode away from San Francisco on my fine new bike. In a day and a half I reached Yosemite National Park.

One afternoon, as I tramped along a mountain, 8,000 feet high, I came directly upon a grand-daddy rattlesnake. Rattlers are not usually found in so high an altitude, but I wasted no time in argument with the malicious-looking creature about his right to be there.

Another hazardous experience presented itself as I was coasting down a steep, winding road one day. In the middle of the hill, my brake refused to function, and immediately the bicycle lurched ahead at breakneck speed. Forty miles an hour I tore around sharp, blind curves which automobiles were required to descend in second gear. I attempted to drag my feet along the ground, but this was useless and only ruined my shoes. At the bottom, the road changed from asphalt to one of rough gravel, and, when the gravel was reached, the jolting and bucking nearly threw me. I finally came to a stop, smoke pouring from the brake, and handlebars bent noticeably out of line.

Reno, Nevada, loomed ahead three days later. Inventory disclosed the disheartening fact that a dollar and fifty cents constituted my entire capital standing. Taking the bitter with the sweet, I continued on. Two days later, another such victim of nomoneyitis happened along in an automobile, and offered me a lift in return for the price of some imminently necessary gasoline. I offered that last dollar without hesitation.

Nothing but a faintly perceptible odor of gasoline remained in the tank when we found Salt Lake City the following morning. One partly filled box of griddle flour stood between us and starvation, and even this barrier vanished as we prepared puny flapjacks from it.

But luck again smiled, and no sooner had I passed from Salt Lake City than a shoemaker and his wife picked me up. They were *en route* to Chicago with a truck load of shoe heels which they peddled in each town. Nineteen long hours a day I worked driving the truck, and at night, finishing ladies' high heels. It took a whole week to reach Cheyenne, Wyoming, a distance of 500 miles. Here money from home awaited, so I promptly returned to cycling.

Nights grew colder and I was forced to patronize tourist homes. At Omaha, Nebraska, the thermometer crept so low that a pair of gloves became necessary.

Spurred on by the cold, I established a trip record of one hundred and forty miles in nine hours, the day I reached Chicago.

But the most memorable day was October 11—the end of three exciting months away from home. I had traveled 7,000 miles, to return weighing five pounds heavier than ever before. The trip had been one long succession of enjoyable experiences, but none could match the happiness within me that night as I peered in through a window at my family gathered about the supper table. . .

That was the way Cole told the tale himself. Yet he left off the real ending to the story. Just a few hours before he returned to New Castle, Cole phoned home to announce his arrival. He knew his father would alert the local press and have a surprise host of local newsmen waiting as Jack peddled the final 100 yards down Euclid Avenue to his home.

In making the call, Cole was really setting his own reverse practical joke on his dad. Instead of going straight through the town, Cole detoured through side streets and back alleys, finally emerging at the rear of his house. Carefully, quietly, he parked his bicycle, crept through the backyard, climbed up the back of the house, and entered his third floor bedroom. As he suspected, a crowd was awaiting his arrival on the front lawn.

Making a rapid change of clothes, he slipped down the front stairs, into the parlor. His father nearly collapsed moments later when he saw his wayward son casually sprawled out in his favorite overstuffed chair reading the newspaper. As usual, Jack Cole had the last laugh.

In 1934, he was planning another trip with his brother Bob—this time down the Mississippi in a canoe. He never made the trip. Instead, he took a wife. Bob got the canoe.

Jack had eloped with his childhood sweetheart, Dorothy Mahoney, to Beaver Falls where he was married (he liked to tell the story later about how he had recruited a tramp off the street to be his best man). Soon he got a job at the American Can Factory and settled down to what seemed to be a normal family life. Her hobby was playing the piano; his hobby, listening to the piano. But Cole's restless creative drive always lurked just beneath the surface. He had learned to cover his frustrations and failures with a quick smile and a joke, to shield his real feelings from outsiders. So, Cole again turned to drawing to relieve the pressures of ambitions and fantasies that remained unfulfilled. He began mailing his cartoons to national magazines with the hope that some of them would sell, just like the advertisement had promised.

Cole's talent couldn't and wouldn't go unrecognized. His first sale to *Boy's Life Magazine*, in 1935, precipitated other acceptances. He was ecstatic; his dream about becoming a professional cartoonist was beginning to materialize. Cole made plans, sharpened his pencils, borrowed $100 from a few friends and local merchants who believed in him, and in 1936, headed for the nation's publishing capital, New York City.

He found a place on West 14th Street in Manhattan and, out of necessity, was forced to live communal style with his bride. He produced stacks of one-panel gag cartoons, but sold few. Even those that sold often took forever to pay off. At one point Cole was so desperate he planned to collect his fee directly from the publisher who lived in Brooklyn.

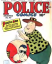
Cole's total bankroll was a single nickle. He had a decision to make: buy a bag of soft pretzels to eat (they filled the stomach by swelling if partaken with a glass of water) or take a subway to Brooklyn. He made the trip but discovered the publisher almost as broke as he was. The man's wife gave Jack a piece of cake to take home and share with his own wife.

It took Cole a year to discover comics or, more accurately, for comics to discover Cole. Failing to break into newspapers with a syndicated strip, he elbowed his way into the embryonic comic industry and found himself occupying a chair in the Harry "A" Chesler Studio. Cole began by apprenticing on strips drawn by other artists, while working side by side with Charles Biro, Lou Fine, Mort Meskin, Fred Guardineer, and others. Inking, lettering, adding backgrounds, all helped form the style that Cole would eventually evolve. As the picture began to look brighter, he wrote this note home:

"It happened this week that I got a letter from a concern that is starting up a new comic magazine soon, and they want me to draw a comic strip for them. This comic magazine will be another along the same line as the ones I am working for at the present time, but it will be a higher class publication. The head of it used to be the president of United Features Syndicate, and he is starting up a new syndicate with the best cartoonists whose works appear in the new magazine. They pay a minimum of $25 per page to start with, and increase the amount according to the circulation of the magazine—in short, we get a royalty for each increase in circulation.

"For the first time since we have been in the cartoon business, our position is absolutely secure. By this I mean to say that from now on every bit of my work is virtually sold before it is drawn—no more stabbing in the dark. This New York venture turned out to be the best possible thing that could have happened to us.

"It would have been impossible to do as much as we have if it hadn't been for MR. & MRS. Cole. I know darn well that it wasn't so much my work that prompted New Castle people to lend us the money to finance this venture, as it was the sterling character of you two. The money was loaned to me with your respected straightforwardness as collateral, and I certainly will make sure that the value of this collateral will in no way be lessened. But I don't mean this strictly in a mercenary sense—every kid wants to grow up to be as good as his parents, and I, being no exception, have about as high a goal as could be possible to strive for. Have tried to do things as you would do them, but unfortunately I am ruled by my heart rather than my head, and sometimes slip up. I have never told you this before, but in case you are interested, I have never taken a drink of beer or liquor yet and never mean to—don't smoke—cuss some but never used His name in a vain expression—please don't think I am bragging—I merely want you to know that these things are what they are because of your influence through 22 years, pounding into the old noggin what is right and vice versa—which, adding all in all, makes yours truly mighty glad the stork didn't drop him down someone else's chimney.



"P.S. It is 5 minutes after 12 o'clock, so it is now Thanksgiving—hope your turkey isn't tough—we're having chicken—the second one since we got hitched—hope it is better than the last one—Ugghh!!"

The comic book Cole mentioned was Monte Bourjaily's *Circus Comics*, a disappointingly short-run magazine which featured Cole's PEEWEE THROTTLE. Late in 1938 in *Keen Detective Funnies*, Cole drew his first "straight" adventure strip, LITTLE DYNAMITE, a uniformed policeman who looked like Dick Tracy as a midget.

Then, in 1939 he was assigned a minor super-hero strip, The Comet. The strip demanded a more literal, realistic approach. Cole made adjustments in his natural big-foot style and met the requirement. Then he accepted the title strip for the first book issued by a new comic company, Your Guide Publishing. That strip, Silver Streak, finally thrust Cole into a position of prominence.

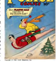
He tightened his realistic style even more and turned out almost a year's run of Silver Streak in addition to Dickie Dean—Boy Inventor. Through those two strips, Cole caught the attention of Everett M. Arnold, publisher of Quality Comics. Arnold invited Cole to join the team he was assembling for his own line of books. The offer was simply too good to turn down. Cole immediately fostered two new strips for Quality, Quicksilver and Midnight, and supplemented them with one-page humor spots like DAN TOOTIN' and SLAP HAPPY PAPPY. He signed his humor fillers "Ralph Johns," a pseudonym he had used on his early super-hero work. It was almost as if Cole was deliberately saving his name for something special.

And 1941 was special!

In Plastic Man, Cole had turned on his talents full blast and created one of the most delightful comic characters ever published. He synthesized his down home Flatt and Scruggs approach with his obvious bent for heroic fantasy. Born of the understandable desire to escape from the constraints of the real, Cole fashioned a work of major importance and lasting value.

His simplistic, angular, hard-edge style reflected the admiration he had for McManus' geometric compositions, an affectation which would have detracted rather than added to the whole if done by less skillful hands. He combined perfect portions of adventure and humor, added a dash of frenetic slapstick style and a pinch of raucous wit to serve up a gourmet's delight of rib-tickling heroics. Plas was a masterpiece of kitsch that proved a good thing couldn't be stretched too far.

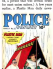
Cole's style was deceptively simple. Flexible fables were told to the pace of a machine-gun gone berserk, yet were still clean, polished and easily read due to Cole's judicious combination of script and art.


POLICE
COMICS
10¢
Does PLASTIC MAN succumb to The Snow Lady?

The concept behind Plastic Man was without precedent. Cole's hero was totally unique, an original that ranked alongside the Human Torch and the Sub-Mariner. Ingeniously, Cole rejected the possibilities of encumbering his character with a mask or hood or helmet or cowl that had become fashionable among the super-hero brotherhood. Instead, he gifted Plas with a pair of shades which were never removed, making him the coolest crime-fighter in comics.

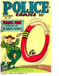
Cole had initially wanted to call the strip, "The India Rubber Man," but at Arnold's suggestion changed it to Plastic Man because—well, somehow it just seemed more fitting. And besides, in the early 40's, plastics were considered a kind of miracle product. Technically, plastic doesn't stretch. But it would mold well into infinite shapes. They took a chance. The name was perfect.

Cole's gentle parody of the superhero genre was so successful that his original $5 page rate increased to $35, $40 then $50. Bonuses from Arnold were often as much as $2500. In addition to starring in *Police Comics* for 102 issues, Plas expanded into his own book in 1946. (The first two issues were published in 1943-44, a period that was certain death for most union suiters.) A few years earlier, a Plastic Man daily newspaper strip was initiated and ran in most papers that carried the Spirit Section. *Plastic Man* ran until November 1956, a total of 64 issues. The zany humor and low comedy approach could easily be the early prototype of *Mad Comics* (who later paid Plas tribute in their version "Plastic Sam").



Cole was a natural humorist. He was Groucho, Chaplin and the Three Stooges on the comic page. He was a dedicated artist. Cole would have drawn cartoons for pennies and the satisfaction of getting the job and the laugh done. He was so in love with the world in which he now dwelled, that he proceded to make a lengthy technicolor movie film (shown only to his fellow staffers) about the life of a cartoonist. But he was dedicated to more than just laughs.

In issue 5 of *Silver Streak*, Cole addressed the reader directly from the splash panel in which he had drawn a small portrait of himself. "Dear Friend; There are some things you ought to know about Silver Streak, the real Silver Streak as I know him and draw him. Do not think of him only as a most unusual man, a man endowed with the speed of lightning—think too, of his great character—the motives behind his amazing actions!



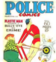
"Could Silver Streak ever be real? To me he is real! Yes, as real as the ideals you and I dream of. His purpose in life is to help others—to help those in need. Silver Streak does his best to make this world an ideal place to live in—a world in which you and I will have the things we most desire.

"And he is out to get those forces that stand in the way of his ideals. He fights hard!! He is strong because he is right—he is fast because he needs speed to conquer his enemies! Silver Streak is my hero and I hope he is your hero too, for he does the things that you and I would do if we had his powers!"

It was signed "Ralph Johns, creator." Regardless of how it may appear now, Cole's invocation was no put-on. He was serious, and meant every word in his little essay. Remember, Jack Cole, was a dreamer, an idealist, and he frequently went out of his way to back up his beliefs. In the early 1940's, the American Communist movement made an effort to infiltrate and organize the comic industry into a union, just as they had done with theatre and film guilds. Cole heard about it and, with the help of artist George Brenner, attended the first meeting and successfully broke it up. He enjoyed being a one hundred percent American.

Previous to his job at Quality, Cole lived with his wife in a four-story walk-up in Bensonhurst, a section of Brooklyn between Flatbush Avenue and Coney Island. Cole frequently worked at home on a drawing board he had rigged up in the bedroom. He drew on illustration board and inked with the thinnest brush available, a double "O" sable.

His success with Plastic Man prompted Cole to buy a house and move to Falls Village, Connecticut, so he could conveniently travel to work at the Quality studio in nearby Stamford. Now, in his late 20's, Cole was entering one of his best periods. The Plastic Man strip brimmed with Cole's zany flash and panache graphics. He had also handled Quality's Death Patrol (a tongue-in-cheek-version of their own best selling Blackhawk series). For awhile, he produced the daily Spirit strip while Eisner did his time in the service.



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But Cole's pungent comic talent wasn't simply confined to the two-dimensional funny pages. He often played the role of jester off-stage as well as on. At one point, Cole and artist Mort Leav worked in adjoining offices separated by a solid partition with glass near the ceiling. Cole (in a manner that would do even Dickie Dean proud), rigged up a system whereby they could communicate. To establish contact, either man would click off and on the flourescent light attached to his drawing board. The action would cause everything on that electric line to flicker, including the other man's light. Once alerted, they would communicate by sign language with the aid of a mirror Cole had affixed to the ceiling at such an angle that both men could see each other. One must realize, of course, that these were comic artists, not human beings.

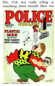
Cole kept the Quality bullpen mercilessly at bay with a continuous barrage of insanity. He seemed particularly inspired when deadlines were crushing in and everyone was sweating to make it on time. On one such occasion, their printer had phoned in to demand an impossibly tight schedule which called for all stories to be finished the following day. The crew grumbled, even screamed, but bore down to do the job. Cole realized this called for drastic measures.

By that afternoon, a deathly silence had descended over the room, except for the cranking of pencil sharpeners and an occasional curse. Then out of the corner of his eye, one of the staff happened to notice a white streak zig-zagging crazily around the room. One by one, the others also became aware of it until all work had stopped.

*The zig-zagging continued !!!*

No longer able to control themselves, they investigated, only to discover Cole had done it to them again. There, glued to the biggest, crazed horsefly they had *ever* seen, was a narrow strip of toilet paper about 10 inches long, on which someone had mysteriously written, "Drink Pepsi Cola." After a silent moment of disbelief, they burst into laughter which continued spasmodically throughout the afternoon. And the job—of course, it got in on time.

In the characters of Woozy and Plas, Cole was really telling us something about himself. Here was Cole as he felt others saw him: an unsophisticated, foot-shuffling country yokel; and Cole as he would like to be seen: a sleek, strong, infallible hero. The real Jack Cole was much of both.



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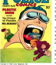
It is said that behind every clown's mask of laughter lies a tragic soul. Jack Cole was no exception. Even though he labored at keeping his co-workers in stitches, Cole himself was a sensitive and penitent individual, a self-effacing genius who, like so many others, constantly felt the need to keep proving himself. When he realized that he could no longer handle the amount of work he accepted, Cole actually broke into tears. The thought of others writing and drawing Plastic Man was, to Cole, a wretched price to pay for his success. Yet, like the popular Superman and Batman strips, it had to happen.

Basically, Cole's style was easy to imitate. A number of Quality staffers stretched Plastic Man thin. Bill Woolfolk, Manly Wade Wellman, Gwenn Hansen, Harry Stein, and even Mickey Spillane scripted the series. Lou Fine, Gill Fox, Charles Nicholas, Ruben Moreira, Al Bryant and others lent their pencils to the cause, while John Belfi and Robin King labored with brush and ink.

Though most of the supermen that were born in the 40's would perish in the same decade, Plastic Man and a struggling handful of others lived on into the 50's to continue the good fight. Most strips folded due to overexposure of their type of subject matter. But Plastic Man was built on a solid foundation of super-heroism and super-humor, enabling him to continue until November of 1956.

Two years earlier, Cole had given up comics and Plastic Man completely, working strictly as a free-lance cartoonist. Over the years, he had been a regular contributor to magazines like *Colliers, The Saturday Evening Post* and *Judge*. But comics had always been good luck to Cole and his severance with them seemed to be a portent of bad tidings. Now 40, Cole was trying to begin a new cartooning career, yet the thought of a syndicated strip never left his mind. Somehow the Coles had never adjusted to the affluence comics had brought them during the good years. And they had had no children during their 20-year marriage.

In 1955, the great New England floods caused additional trouble and tragedy for the Coles. Nearly all their furniture and possessions were lost in the disaster. Cole moved to Cary, Illinois, presumably to be closer to *Playboy Magazine* which was now running Females By Cole, a series of singular cartoons, each portraying an aspect of the feminine mystique. In addition, Cole had been contributing heavily to *Playboy's* humor with a barrage of sophisticated full-color cartoons.



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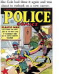
Then, in May of 1958, Cole's lifelong dream suddenly materialized—the *Chicago Sun-Times* Syndicate signed a contract with him to produce a daily and Sunday newspaper strip. Titled BETSY AND ME, the strip introduced Chester B. Tibbett, a department store floorwalker, his wife Betsy, and their five-year old son, Farley. The story took a different approach to the overworked marriage/family theme, beginning with the fact that it was narrated by the lead character, Chester. It looked like Cole had done it again and was about to embark on a new career.



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He had achieved his ultimate goal and was ready to join Segar, McManus, Dirks, and all the rest. The *Sun-Times* immediately sold 50 papers on the strip and Cole began working in earnest.

Several months later, in August, he was celebrating his good fortune with Hugh Hefner and other associates at a *Playboy* party. They toasted him and the new strip. At 43, Cole had fulfilled his life's ambition. He was a success as a cartoonist, in good shape financially, and in the prime of his life.

The following morning, Cole sat on the back steps of his home, staring somberly into the distance. After awhile he put on his jacket and drove to a neighborhood store where he purchased a .22 pistol. Then he phoned a friend and said he was about to take his life.

Cole returned to his car, drove onto the highway and, after a few miles, shot himself. He was still alive when they found him, but the damage was too great. He died that day, August 15, 1958.

His brother, Bob, went to Illinois to help straighten out Jack's estate. He spent days tripping over a tape recorder in the studio, a recorder which Jack had often used to dictate gags and ideas. Under the strain of the situation, he never thought to turn it on—later realizing the tapes might reveal a clue to Jack's untimely suicide.

Cole's final note was unintelligible.

Those who knew him remember Cole as a big boy of a man with a friendly, Bugs Bunny kind of a smile. Those that didn't will remember his legacy, the human rubber-band in the bright red tights, Plastic Man.

NOVEMBER NO. 26

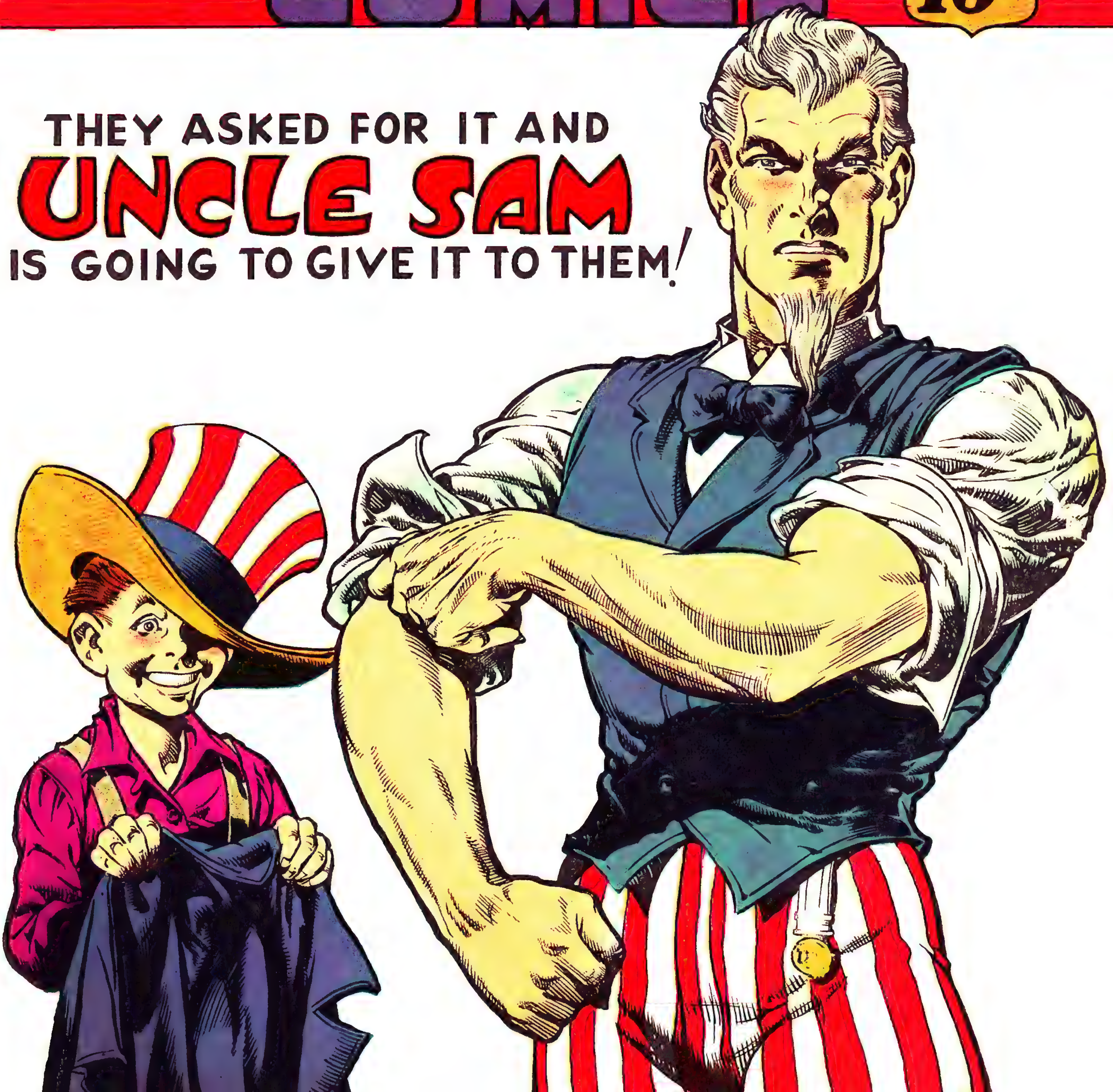
# NATIONAL COMICS

10¢

QUALITY COMIC GROUP

SM ★ 11

THEY ASKED FOR IT AND
UNCLE SAM
IS GOING TO GIVE IT TO THEM!

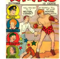


# THE BIG SUPER HERO SHOW

It was a parade!

Not just *a* parade—this was a parade like no other—an endless cavalcade of breathtaking comic pageantry. They came on by the scores, by the hundreds—an entourage of supermen who flew through the air like they were shot out of cannons (some of them were) and fantastic women with beauty and strength meant only for mythological goddesses. Magicians, flame breathers, India rubber men, human speed demons, they were a rainbow of heroes and heroines who marched to the music of their own battle cries under the furled banner that heralded Quality Comics.

Together they presented a spectacular circus of drama, comedy, adventure and thrills that was unequalled by any of the other big shows. The Quality performers were somehow more colorful, more lively, more exciting than the rest. Title for title, character for character, they had more flash and flamboyancy than any yet offered in the kaleidoscope of the comic world.


FEATURE FUNNIES
OCTOBER
10 CENTS
WILL YOU GO TO A NEUTRAL CORNER?
IF YOU'LL TELL ME WHERE NEUTRAL CORNER IS
MICKEY FINN

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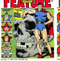
FEATURE COMICS
AUGUST
DOLL MAN

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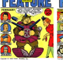
FEATURE COMICS
FEBRUARY
10¢

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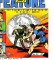
FEATURE COMICS
JANUARY
No. 64

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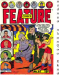
FEATURE COMICS
No. 67
10¢

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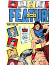
Why? Because the show's ringmaster had the audacity to christen his company's name *Quality*—then made it his business to live up to that self-imposed title. He saw to it that Quality Publications boasted more outstanding talent than any other company in the comic field.

The man behind Quality was Everett M. Arnold, but those who knew him well called him by his nickname, "Busy." Born in Providence, Rhode Island on May 20, 1890, "Busy" Arnold earned that name because of his persistent habit of talking to his classmates in school. His teachers' repeated admonitions, "Turn around, you busybody!" finally caught on with the kids and stuck with Arnold throughout his life.

After graduating from Brown College in Boston where he majored in economics, Arnold found employment with R. Hoe and Company, printing press manufacturers. Then

◁ Reed Crandall captures the true spirit of comics on the cover of *National* 26.

he became the Eastern Sales Representative for the Goss Printing Company with headquarters in New York. During his twelve years with that company, Arnold sold color presses to Eastern Color and the McClure Newspaper Syndicate who had a printing plant in Baltimore. It was here that Arnold first encountered the comic page. Then he contacted Walter Koessler, a Buffalo, New York printer who turned out small weekly newspapers, and persuaded him to invest in a color plant for the purpose of printing comic sections. After lining up a number of accounts to use the new facilities, Arnold resigned from Goss to join Koessler at Greater Buffalo Press as Vice President.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They now printed a considerable amount of color comic newspaper sections which enabled Arnold to develop a useful foundation on which he was able to base his knowledge of the techniques of reproduction. In addition, Arnold established valuable contacts with newspaper editors and publishers all over the country.

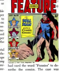
In 1936, Arnold was instrumental in helping Bill Cook and John Mahon publish one of the first groups of comics which included *Funny Pages*, *Funny Pictures Stories*, *Detective Picture Stories* and *Keen Detective Funnies*. Through Arnold, the books were printed by Dan Hanna, publisher of the *Cleveland News*, with the cover printing, binding, and shipping done by the Penton Press, also in Cleveland.

Their books were somewhat less than a smashing success and occasionally Mahon had difficulty paying his bills. In all truth, during this period, the comic book business seemed to have little future and an even smaller potential for financial success.

But "Busy" Arnold took a chance. He decided to become a comic book publisher on his own, armed only with his extensive background of printing experience, the will to succeed, and the sales figures of Eastern Color's *Famous Funnies*. The Cook-Mahon titles showcased all original material, while *Famous Funnies* reprinted the most popular comic strips from the newspapers. The two opposing formats, Arnold felt, made all the difference between success and failure.

In the summer of 1937, Arnold formed a corporation, (Comic Favorites, Inc.) with the McNaught Syndicate, the Frank J. Markey Syndicate, and Gardner (Mike) and John Cowles of the Register and Tribune Syndicate, and opened an office at 39th and Lexington in New York City. Rube Goldberg, who had just started a new strip called Lala Palooza, and his assistant, Johnny Devlin, helped Arnold put together the first few issues of his new comic book, *Feature Funnies*, which started in October 1937. Arnold was promptly sued by *Famous Funnies*, who contended he had infringed on their property by using the word "Funnies", a term they claimed to have coined for their own books.

When the case came to court, Arnold produced for his defense, Joe Connelly, the president of King Features Syndicate. Testimony revealed that in 1906, Carl Sandburg had used the word "Funnies" to describe the comics. The case was immediately dropped. No damages.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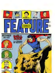
But, after 21 issues, Arnold changed the title anyway. The book became *Feature Comics* and continued to run the same strips—Joe Palooka, Mickey Finn and Dixie Dugan, three of the most popular newspaper series of the decade. Filling out the book were Jane Arden, Lala Palooza, Big Top, Crack Casey, Ned Brant, The Bungle Family, Toddy, Slim and Tubby, Lena Pry and other strips. Other filler features were also required to pad a 64-page book, so Arnold approached Bill Cook, the former editor of the ill-fated Cook-Mahon titles. Cook put Arnold in touch with his artists and writers, a number of whom became the core of the Quality bullpen.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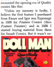
One of those staffers was George Brenner. He had written and drawn The Clock, which ran in most of the Cook-Mahon comics. In *Feature 3*, he continued the adventures of The Clock.

Brenner was a former football star from Villanova University who later became an editor at Quality. The Clock made almost 65 appearances in the Quality books alone and was frequently a cover feature. Hugh Hazard And His Iron Man—Bozo The Robot was another Brenner creation, as was Biff And His Buddies and #711.

Others soon joined the rapidly growing staff at Quality even though much of the material was being produced in shops, which included the Harry "A" Chesler studio and the Eisner and Iger shop. Collectively, they all were responsible for turning out a number of the finest books in comics' Golden Age. "Busy" Arnold recounted the opening era of Quality comics like this:

"Unless my memory is faulty, I believe the first feature I purchased from Eisner and Iger was Espionage in 1938 for *Feature Comics* (then *Feature Funnies*) and in 1939 I started buying material from them for *Smash Comics*. But it wasn't until 1940, when they supplied most of the pages for my five new titles, as well as some material for *Police Comics*, that I became top customer with Eisner and Iger.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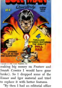
"Eisner produced a fair amount of material for Quality Comics, most of it in a two year period (1940 and 1941). In 1941, a good part of his energy was devoted, with his small staff in Tudor City, to meeting deadlines on The Spirit, Lady Luck and Mr. Mystic for my weekly newspaper comic book as well as the daily strip of The Spirit. Eisner and Iger supplied all or most of the material for the first issues of *Hit Comics*, *Crack Comics*, *National Comics*, *Uncle Sam* and *Military Comics*, but until paper restrictions sent sales sky high, these titles all sold very poorly (if I hadn't been making big money on *Feature* and *Smash Comics* I would have gone broke). So I dropped some of the Eisner and Iger material and tried to replace it with better features.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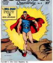
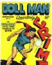
"By then I had an editorial office in the Gurley Building in Stamford, staffed by Ed Cronin, Gill Fox, Jack Cole, Lou Fine, Tony DiPreta and Zoltan Szenics. Since it was a long round trip for Lou Fine (who was partially crippled) to make each day between New York and Stamford, I rented a studio for Lou in the Woodstock Tower in Tudor City, a large Manhattan high-rise complex. When Eisner split with Iger, I took a larger apartment in the same building for Eisner and his staff (Lou Fine stayed in the smaller quarters where he worked alone). Chuck Cuidera, Alex Kotzky, Bob Powell, Tex Blaisdell, Nick Viscardi and Bill Williams, as well as a couple of background men, worked in this Tudor City studio in 1941.

"I now had Fine and Crandall, two of the top artists in the business, but no worthwhile writers to supply them with suitable scripts. With the exception of Jack Cole, none of my freelance artists (Brenner, Gustafson, Henkel, Pinajian, etc) were much good on stories. Gwen Hansen and others sweated long hours trying to write suitable scripts for Doll Man, Black Condor, The Ray and Blackhawk (I even wrote a Blackhawk but I didn't have the nerve to tell Crandall, so I put a phoney name on it). Both Lou and Reed were complaining about the fourth-rate scripts they were being handed and I knew I had to do something fast. Or we were 'dead ducks.'

"Harry 'A' Chesler was then selling me some features for *Military* and *Police Comics*, so the next time he came to Stamford I sounded him out on the name of a good writer. Harry told me John Beardsley was a Fawcett comics editor and was just the man I needed. The next day Beardsley came to Stamford, and I promptly hired him and ordered John to report early the next morning (he showed up about 11 o'clock with a bad hang-over) in the large quarters I had just sub-let from a fading advertising agency on 39th Street and Lexington Avenue.

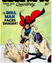


"I soon found that even when he was sober, Beardsley could not write comic strips and he had very few original ideas. But he did immediately line up Manly Wade Wellman, Bill Woolfolk, Joe Millard and Harry Stein to write scripts. So Lou Fine and Reed Crandall were very happy with the new stories. Eisner was a terrific idea man with great imagination and wonderful break-down ability, but his stories were not to be compared with those of Woolfolk, Wellman, Millard, and Stein. So I learned the hard way that there was no substitute for racy, well-written and smooth-reading scripts and that the writers were even more important than the artists. Of course, the idea was to get 'tops' in both. George Brenner had a friend named Father Casey, a Catholic priest who had done some art work for us and even wrote a few comic scripts (they were almost as bad as my Blackhawk).



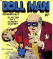
"During the war years I was lucky to have both Crandall and Bill Ward stationed in this country where they could still do plenty of work for me. Most of the time Reed lived off post—one summer he and his wife stayed in my apartment at Hotel Ten Park Avenue. Woolfolk and Stahl were out after three months in the service with medical discharges. Bart Tumey was here for nearly two years before being shipped to France. Like Jack Cole, Bart could write excellent stories. Bart, after the war, married Virginia Drury who worked in our coloring department.

"Cuidera and Kotzky were already in the service and Bill Eisner had his induction notice so he left Bob Powell at Tudor City and checked into the Roger Smith Hotel in Stamford. Bill worked night and day getting way ahead on the weekly Spirit stories and made the breakdowns and also did the important figure work. I was in New York most days with Gwen Hansen giving Beardsley the constant needle to roll out work in the new office there. I saw Eisner mostly evenings and weekends during his brief Stamford stay before he put on a uniform for nearly 4 years. The New York quarters were right across the street from our first office there (369 Lexington Avenue) where Rube Goldberg helped me put together the first issue of *Feature Funnies* in the early summer of 1937.



"From 1942 to the end of the war we, like everyone else, made enormous profits (if they had had paper quotas then, even Victor Fox and Harry Chesler would have made big money during the war years). Our greatest prosperity started in 1946. And our magazines were greatly improved by then. Eisner took back the production of the weekly comic book and Lou Fine stayed with me another two years. With Crandall, Ward, Kotsky, Cole, Bryant, Gustafson, Sahle, Zolnerowich, Palais, Elkan, Rico, and a dozen others backed by top inkers like Cuidera, Robin King, Ruth Harris and Janice Valleau, we had a great staff at 25 West 45th Street. The scripts were still handled by Woolfolk, Wellman and Millard (joined later by Bill Finger) with Harry Stein writing the humor and romance leads."

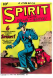
With Arnold at the helm, Quality soon scored with some of the all-time top-selling comic publications. National Publications led the field with the Archie comic group in second place. Quality tied for the number three spot with the Timely, Fawcett and Harvey books. Dell, of course, outsold all of them with the popular Disney comics, but this was to a somewhat different audience.



In 1939, "Busy" Arnold and the Cowles Brothers bought out McNaught and Markey, each now owning fifty percent of Quality Comics, which published their titles under the corporate name of Comic Magazines, Inc. For many years the Cowles published *Look* magazine and owned many mid-western radio and TV stations besides a string of newspapers and the Des Moines Register and Tribune Syndicate. Under this new arrangement Arnold packaged and sold the Sunday Spirit section to papers across the country with the Register and Tribune Syndicate acting as sales agents. The 16-page color supplement featured Eisner's Spirit and two back-up strips, Mr. Mystic and Lady Luck.

Like Brenner, Eisner had also worked on the Cook-Mahon books, afterward establishing a production shop with one of his former editors, S. M. Iger. The Eisner and Iger shop produced a number of strips for Quality's early books.

With Eisner as referee, Quality had released a barrage of titles, each of which was calculated to deliver a knockout punch to the competition. He delivered the first issues of *Crack*, *Hit* and *Smash* with the jolt of an uppercut, then followed through with *National* and *Police*. Each trained a dozen super heroes between their covers. All the titles remained heavyweight champions until the inauspicious 50's made them throw in the towel.



*Military Comics* joined the Quality best-sellers as did later quarterlies like *Doll Man*, *Uncle Sam*, *Blackhawk*, *Plastic Man* and *The Spirit*. Unlike some publishers who would create new titles and drop them after a few issues of poor sales, Quality kept the titles and juggled the strips inside. Whatever other publishers could claim, none turned out such an incredibly diversified profusion of comic characters.

The DOLL MAN was the littlest heavyweight of them all. Yet he chalked up a total of 14 years of crimebusting, a year less than the Blackhawks' run (don't forget, they outnumbered him six to one—high odds in anyone's book). He began his career in *Feature Comics* 27 (December 1939), a fact which enables him to claim the title of being the first Quality super hero.

But the Doll Man (how embarrassing!!) didn't become Quality's official champ until issue 32, when he took his first cover bow. Previously the newspaper characters did the cover honors, but with issue 31, Quality lost Joe Palooka, Dixie Dugan and Mickey Finn to Columbia's Big

# DOLL MAN

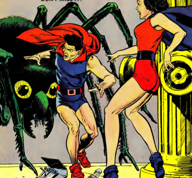
QUALITY COMIC PUBLICATION

## THE WORLD'S MIGHTIEST MITE

JUNE NO.40

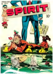
10¢

WEIRD! FANTASTIC!
INSECTS AS LARGE AS DOGS,
MICE THE SIZE OF ELEPHANTS
AND MEN TOWERING OVER BUILDINGS!
IN
GIANTS OF CRIME!
DON'T MISS IT!



*Shot Comics* (Finn ran simultaneously in both books). The loss was perfect timing for the mighty mite to jump in the ring and steal the show.

Darrel Dane was the Doll Man's civilian identity. To become the miniature manhunter, Darrell deigned to resort to the usual methods comic booksters always used, like saying a magic word, swallowing a secret potion or climbing into a special outfit that was invulnerable to bullets. He simply willed it to happen.



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Suddenly all the molecules in his body would undergo a compression that reduced Darrel Dane to a height of five inches. Of course he maintained his normal strength which enabled him to kayo the comic criminals he caught. He wore no mask, only a blue sleeveless tunic with a short red cape and boots, all designed by Eisner.

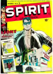
Doll Man's supporting characters included his fiancee, Martha Roberts, and her scientist-father, Dr. Roberts. Unlike the mini-heroes who came after him (DC's Atom and Marvel's Antman/Giant Man), Doll Man had no control over his size. He was either grownup Darrel Dane or tiny Doll Man.

Doll Man played "Land of the Giants" in a world populated with colossal props. The incredible shrinking sleuth made being little a ball as he rode on frogs as big as elephants and shot police specials as massive as cannons. He was menaced by giant pussycats, used fountain pens and scissors as weapons, was trapped in bird cages. He used pencils to pole vault and rubber bands for catapults. He hid behind inkwells and books and kept getting shoved into desk drawers. Readers lost count of how many mail slots he slipped through.

If the Doll Man needed transportation, he'd jump in a friendly pocket, or purse or briefcase. Sometimes he'd hitch a ride on a passing car bumper or bicycle. Even a roller skate would do. For a time, the diminutive detective even teamed up with a dog which he rode like a horse. Later, the dog was traded-in for a mini-plane. Then, the Doll Man really used his head and, in December 1951, had Martha join him as Doll Girl. Anyone for playing doll house?

The compact crime-hunter was another classic that Will Eisner and "Busy" Arnold adapted to the comics —this time, of course, *Gulliver's Travels*. (Paul Bunyan appeared as himself in Quality comics.) Eisner wrote and did the breakdowns for the early stories drawn by Lou Fine and later by John Cassone, Rudy Palais, Maxwell Elkan, Bill Ward, Mort Leav, Fran Matera, and others. Bill Woolfolk, Robert Hyatt and Joe Millard scripted the series.

Al Bryant, however, drew Doll Man longer than any other artist. Bryant was a tall, handsome Gregory Peck type who was a competent back-up man in the Quality bullpen. He worked other top strips like Blackhawk, Plastic Man and Kid Eternity and was featured on many Quality covers because of his direct poster-like approach, and simple, clean rendering. Bryant's art was more than adequate and always well drawn in the Quality style but not as explosively inspirational as Crandall or Lou Fine. In the late 40's, Bryant was the victim of a severe mental breakdown which forced him to leave the comic field.



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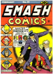
Doll Man however was to continue in *Feature* until October 1949, issue 139. In the fall of 1941, he was awarded his own book, a quarterly, which endured a 49-issue run until October 1953. Ironically, the lilliputian crime-smasher would watch from floor level as his big brothers toppled and vanished, again proving "The bigger they are . . ."

*Feature's* changeover from newspaper reprint book to super hero comic also marked the debut of RUSTY RYAN. The strip lacked direction until issue 46 when Ryan formed THE BOY BRIGADIERS.



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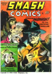
"Six boys too young to join the armed forces, strike out at our enemies in their own way! Through their uncanny deeds they receive a special commission to assist the army intelligence!"

The gang had the typical red, white and blue costumes their profession demanded. Two Negro characters were added in 1943 when the strip was played for laughs. The Brigadiers were Quality's answer to Timely's Young Allies or DC's Boy Commandos. Paul Gustavson drew many of their adventures which continued until June 1949 with issue 135.

Fortunately, Quality had few strips like the one which premiered in *Feature* 57—THE SPIDER WIDOW, Grandmother of Terror! "Beneath the mask of the Spider Widow was the beautiful, athletic Dianne Grayton, society darling! Unknown to all, she wages a lone crusade against the forces of evil with only the aid of her black widow spiders!" Artist Frank Borth must take the blame for this creeper who dressed like a witch. With little success, a character named THE RAVEN (he wore a large black raven's head and wings), was added to hype up the strip. Thankfully someone called the exterminator after 15 issues.



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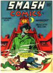
Other *Feature* fillers offered almost every type of strip conceivable: western, crime, space, humor, funny animal, supernatural, soldier of fortune, you-name-it. They ran the gamut, from indefensively imitative to mildly engaging.

Adventurers like CAPTAIN FORTUNE, RANCE KEANE, DUSTY DANE, and BRUCE BLACKBURN showed up in profusion. SAMAR—Jungle King, THE ACE OF SPACE and ZERO—Ghost Detective made their offerings as did REYNOLDS OF THE MOUNTED and THE FARGO KID. USA, THE SPIRIT OF OLD GLORY, and SPIN SHAW appealed to the costumed and aviation readers.

Another strip that played a minor key on the pages of *Feature* was SWING SISSON. His charts were arranged by writer Bob Turner who transposed his interest in jazz to a comic combo that included Swing, his sax man Toby Tucker, and band vocalist Bonnie Baxter. The group split their time putting notes between musical bars and putting thugs behind jail bars.



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Scoring a total of 139 issues, (October 1949) *Feature Comics* was the backbone of Quality's line-up. Their switch to super hero stuff was augmented by the opening issue of *Smash Comics*, August 1939.

A trio of strips shared billing and covers for the first year—Bozo the Robot, Espionage, and Wings Wendall. In retrospect, all of them remain rather undistinguished in comparison with Quality's leading strips.

George Brenner's HUGH HAZARD AND HIS ROBOT—BOZO THE IRON MAN rivited the reader's attention if only because of the length of the title. Hazard would make the indestructable metal man come to life when he climbed inside it like a deep sea diver's suit, or when he ran it by remote control. Even though he could fly, Bozo's tin can, Wizard of Oz type form lacked super-star appeal. DC's Robotman was the only strip of its

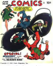
◁ Doll Man, Doll Girl, and friend by Reed Crandall.

kind that succeeded in engaging readers on a long term basis. Brenner's art was, to his credit, not an imitation of another style. Still, it lacked any appreciable formal control or stylistic thrust that was required to dazzle the 1940's comic fan. Bozo's mainspring wound down in *Smash* 41.

Brenner got the lead spot in *Smash* because he had become Arnold's right-hand man. Both were college athletes and long time friends, a fact that Arnold considered in placing Brenner's work. By 1943, Brenner became an editor for Quality Publications.

ESPIONAGE STARRING BLACK X co-starred in *Smash* for a record 85 issues. Black X (known as the Black Ace for the first 5 issues) was an American secret agent who polished off international criminals and spies as easily as he polished the monacle he wore in his right eye. X was a series that Eisner had created in the pages of *Feature* 13 (October 1938) under the alias of Will Erwin. Somewhat less sensational than some of his other characters, X was a typical genre piece, distinguished only by the fact that it endured 11 years exposure before it came in from the cold. Credit must be given to Dan Zolnerowich, Mort Leav, Vernon Henkel, Alex Kotsky, Berne Sachs, Joe Kubert, Don Rico, Bill Quackenbush and others who contributed to X's subversive spy thrillers.

*Smash* 1 also launched WINGS WENDALL into the comic skyways for a total of 39 missions. Modestly titled "The World's Greatest Flyer," the strip was just one of many Quality aviation actioners. Staffer Vernon Henkel drew the planes and their pilots competently in a flowing and unforced style which made Wendall easy to read and easy to forget.



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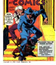
Kent Thurston played the Shadow in *Smash* by enveloping himself in an invisible robe which in turn made him invisible. Artist Art Pinajian's mildly amusing and imitative INVISIBLE JUSTICE (Hooded Justice in issue 1) materialized for 33 adventures before vanishing completely.

MAGNO, THE SCARLET SEAL and THE PURPLE TRIO also appeared in *Smash's* early years. The latter strip billed three unemployed vaudevillians: Warren, the ventriloquist; Rocky, the strongman; and Tiny, the midget. Every comic publisher used the same strip and the same characters (under a variety of titles) at one time or another. None of them were even remotely interesting.

What *Smash* lacked up to this point was a minor masterwork. It showed up in issue 14 (September 1941). THE RAY was a character in the very best super hero tradition; an offbeat origin, an extraordinary costume, a kid sidekick, an alter ego and a gimmick. All this and a top artist too!



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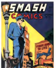
The story of the Ray began in a newspaper office (a perennial favorite of comic book writers, next to scientific laboratories and District Attorneys' offices). Cub reporter Happy Terrill is assigned by his editor to cover a balloon ascent led by Professor Styne into the stratosphere.

As it turns out, Terrill has already signed up as a crew member for the dangerous experimental passage. A few panels later, a balloon carrying the crew in an enclosed sphere soars through a strata of cloud layers on its way to the very edge of space itself.

The experiment seems to be successful until Terrill notices an open valve on the outer hull of the sphere. He volunteers to close it even though a cosmic storm races down upon them. Making his way along a narrow catwalk that circles the ship, Terrill clings for his life to the metal shell as it is swept violently upward toward a blinding scintilla of radiance.

Caught in the midst of the maelstrom, Terrill's physical appearance begins to change (the high spot in every origin story—whatever comes after could only be anti-climactic). Terrill shrinks visibly. Suddenly a brilliant, incandescent beam of light appears where Terrill had been. In his place, a golden figure, like a ray of sunlight soars toward the heavens.



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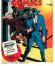
When the airborne expedition lands, Terrill is reported lost. But the Professor has discovered a new gas, one that has the explosive power of 100 tons of TNT in every cubic inch. A potential super-weapon. A temptation to super-criminals.

Next, Anton Rox (???) and his gang make plans to get the formula. At night they enter the Professor's lab and shoot him, escaping with the prize. Out of nowhere, a figure in yellow appears to find the Professor still alive. "Who are you? You look like Terrill, but you've a strange look!"

"I'm The Ray! Terrill is dead, forget him!" replies the tall figure who is clad in a long sleeved tunic with a sunburst collar, a cowl with a fin on top and folded-over boots—all yellow, like a beam of light. A marvelous outfit, it was the only one of its kind in comics (the bare legs were soon replaced with tights).

Suddenly he vanishes, to appear in the headlights of Rox's getaway car. The thugs draw their guns and fire, but their bullets have no effect on The Ray. He gathers them with a magnetic force, the same one he uses to ground the escaping Rox's airplane. An ordinary punch finally puts the master criminal out of action. The tale ends with the gang in a jail cell, huddled in a shaft of light. The Ray returns the formula to Styne and disappears in a dazzling aurora of luminescence.



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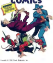
The Ray's powers were never clearly defined. At times he could fly through the air with the best of them. Sometimes he needed the aid of a stream of light; at other times he had to walk. He could be captured and held powerless in a darkened room, but a moonbeam, a flashlight, spotlight or flare would turn him into a golden fury.

In *Smash* 19, The Ray assumed his civilian identity of reporter Happy Terrill, and two issues later adopted his juvenile sidekick, Bud, the victim of a trans-Atlantic clipper disaster. The two shared adventures for the duration of the strip, adventures which were always imaginative and well-written.



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It would be difficult to find a Quality strip that is totally tasteless and without merit. Most were a cut above average, many were exceptionally well done. Arnold's "Quality" applied to the entire line, in every sense of the word. Fine is another word that might apply.

Lou Fine that is!

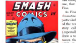
A star in the Quality shop, Louis Kenneth Fine created The Ray and became one of the most influential figures in the history of comics. Born in Manhattan in 1914, he entered the comic scene casually. "At the time, I thought I'd only try it for about six months," Fine admits. He was studying engineering at the New York School of Technology and found himself in need of finances. "I got into comics because they offered money—$10 a week!"

Fine joined more than a dozen

others at the Eisner-Iger "sweat" shop in the late 30's and helped turn out books like the oversize black and white *Jumbo Comics*. He continued working on an array of Fiction House books, primarily for the covers of their jungle titles and Stuart Taylor, a time machine strip in the regular size *Jumbo*. The Flame ignited under Fine's touch for Fox Publications, as did Rocketman and Master Key in Harry Chesler's books.

Lou Fine was never really comfortable in the time/money/production atmosphere of the shop. "You were always under pressure and had to make a deadline," Fine remembers. "If you slowed down, God forbid, there was always someone looking over your shoulder. I'd often attempt to develop sequences or scenes and Iger would say 'Don't spend a year on it!' We had a quota of pages to fill every day or else!"

Fine was a slow, methodical draftsman who often worked overtime, frequently all night, to catch up. Winding up one grueling all-night stretch at 8 o'clock in the morning, Fine stepped out for a breath of fresh air and a cup of coffee. He returned an hour and 10 minutes later only to be rewarded with a scathing tongue lashing for being late to work.



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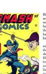
Still, he enjoyed the company of those with which he worked in comics. "Powell had a great sense of life, he was loud, boisterous, but never obnoxious," says Fine. "Jack Cole was a practical joker, but a well read man and a great humorist." Of Crandall he admits, "We were both a couple of prima donnas!"

Both brilliant anatomists, Crandall and Fine were perfect for super hero strips. The subject matter demanded a surgeon's knowledge of the human body and few artists were as well qualified. Both worked on the same strips. A kid could spend a whole Saturday afternoon going through a pack of Dubble Bubble Gum and a stack of Quality Comics, deciding who they liked better doing what on which strip.



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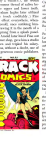
Eisner had taken them with him when he dissolved his partnership with Iger. In an effort to cut shop expenses at Quality, Eisner once bought a gross of Japanese brushes at about a nickel apiece to replace the Winsor & Newtons which then cost 75¢ each. Though Eisner didn't realize it, the bristles in the new brushes lacked the resiliency of the old ones, and nobody in the shop had enough control to use them. No one, that is, except Eisner and Lou Fine.

As Fine reached for new ways to dramatize his work, he hit upon one particularly unusual touch that amused the rest of the bullpen. When the story called for an open mouth (especially a villain's), he would draw a tenuous thread of saliva between the upper and lower teeth. (EC's Graham Ingles later utilized the same touch creditably.) Fine used the effect everywhere, whenever he could, once outdoing himself by drawing it in the mouth of a rat that sprang from a splash panel.

"Busy" Arnold later hired Fine out of the Eisner shop, gave him a studio of his own and tripled his salary. Arnold was, without a doubt, one of the most generous comic publishers.



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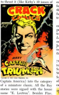
He was always very fair with the artists and believed in sharing the wealth. He often delivered an extra bonus to his men in appreciation for their work and loyalty. He was, perhaps, the only publisher who paid his men what they were really worth.

Arnold's deal with Fine stipulated no specific amount of pages be produced, yet Fine carried a lion's share of Quality strips. He drew the Black Condor in *Crack*, Stormy Foster—the Defender in *Hit*, and a galaxy of others like Quicksilver, Uncle Sam, Neon and Hack O'Hara, besides ghosting The Spirit for several years while Eisner was in the service.

Yet it is The Ray that remains as Fine's high-scoring *tour de force*. Of the 28 Ray stories published, Fine did about half, not many, but enough to thrust it (like Kirby's 10 issues of Captain America) into the category of a miniature classic. All the Ray stories were signed with the house name "E. Lectron". Besides Fine, others like Reed Crandall, Rudy Palais and Dave Berg turned The Ray into a spotlight feature.



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Fine, who had studied briefly at Pratt Institute and The Art Students League, developed an uncanny knowledge of the human figure in action. His heroes were olympian in stature, classicly featured and exquisitely, almost delicately, proportioned. Fine lavished a wealth of stipple, line-shaded, and cross-hatched detail with a brilliant brush-line technique not found in comics up to that point. An expert adept at nuance of character, he lingered over faces and hands to produce a gallery of expressive portraits etched in fear, hatred, avarice and death.

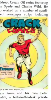
If Crandall was a more realistic storyteller, Fine was more imaginative and stylized. He thrust the reader beyond the literal, into the realm of fantasy. His richly romantic approach established a mood at once lyrical and enigmatic, yet charged with tense, feverish energy. Fine produced apocalyptic fables, his delicate art applying superb counterpoint to tales based on crime and violence. The two anomalies balanced out. The result, a stunning and compelling work of comic art.

His style was influenced primarily by the great German draftsman Heinrich Kley and by the paintings of Frank Brangwyn and magazine illustrators, Dean Cornwell and Saul Tepper. Fine popularized the "illustration school" approach to comic graphics.

Where his early work had been flawed by superfluous detail, Fine's Quality art, admittedly self-indulgent, was now intelligently refined. Though he lacked the raw power of Kirby or Meskin, Fine's figures bent, swooped, fought, twisted and flew like none had ever done before. Fine the draftsman became Fine the educator. Artists collected his strips for anatomy lessons and later swiped the figures. To this day his work still functions as reference material—a tribute to his excellence.

Lou Fine chose to end his comic career in the early 40's. Instead, he preferred to work on straight illustration for slick magazines like *Liberty*. In addition, Fine became one of the most popular artists at Johnstone and Cushing, an advertising agency that housed a stable of the best comic draftsmen.

Fine turned out a score of Phillip Morris cigarette ads all done in strip form. They ran in magazines and in Sunday color sections as did Fine's Wildroot Cream Oil series featuring Sam Spade and Charlie Wild. He also worked on a number of syndicated newspaper strips including Adam Ames, and his own Peter Scratch, a feet-on-the-desk private eye character.



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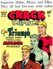
For his superhero work, Fine has earned a revered and lasting place in the comic hall of fame. His rendition of the Ray and the Black Condor have since become milestones in the golden age history of comics.

As humor began to dominate the Quality books more and more, a new strip, appropriately titled MID-

NIGHT, eclipsed The Ray out of the *Smash* spotlight. Its success was predicated on Jack Cole's unique brand of funny business: the satire. It was the first of Cole's trio of comic satires which would include The Death Patrol, and his tongue-in-cheek super hero, Plastic Man. Now Cole took careful aim, his pencil loaded, and with The Spirit in his sights, hit the bullseye with Midnight.

Radio announcer Dave Clark put on a blue eye-mask, red tie and blue business suit (it was black in the early issues) to become the crime-crushing Midnight. Bearded inventor Doc Wackey; Gabby, a talking monkey; and a small white bear replaced Inspector Dolan, Ebony and Ellen. They all had two-way wrist radios a la Dick Tracy but there any resemblance ended and Cole's madcap antics began. The strip ran from issue 18 to 85 with artists like Gill Fox, John Belfi and Paul Gustavson taking over after Cole.



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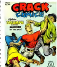
A pair of heroines powdered their noses in *Smash Comics*, WILDFIRE and LADY LUCK. Funny fillers like BUTCH BACHELOR, CITRONELLA, ARCHIE O'TOOLE and SPUNKY also made *Smash* their home as did straight non-costumers like YANKEE EAGLE and ROOKIE RANKIN.

Rookie policeman Chuck Lane donned the outlandish garb of THE JESTER in *Smash* 22 to prove crime was no laughing matter. But seriously folks, Paul Gustavson created and put the colorful comedian through his paces in the early years of the strip which ran from May 1941 to October 1949. The Jester wore a yellow and black polka-dot shirt, striped pants, a red jester's mask and collar, and a green vest with matching trunks. Funny villians, like the Toyman, The Joker and The Prankster, were always favorites, why not a hero too? Anyone who didn't think so, discovered the joke was on them.



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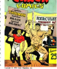
In *Smash* 33 (May 1942) Ed Cronin's MARKSMAN hit the target. "No deadlier adversary confronts the invading Nazis than the elusive Marksman! Last of a long line of Polish nobles, Baron Povalski now strikes at the enemy using his ancestors' weapon—the bow and arrow—while at the same time he masquerades as Major Hertz of the Nazi army!" In issue 40, Fred Guardineer drew a bead on the strip which lasted a sensible three years (until the war ended). His handling of the Polish Robin Hood showed his usual, undiminished command of the subject matter.

As the super hero trend began to wane, Quality replaced them with other features, mostly, if not all, humorous. Other publishers like Timely and National attempted to battle the tidal wave of change by unnaturally prolonging the fading heroic period. Quality didn't resist, gradually shifting the emphasis on all their titles, including *Smash*. But in the early years, super heroes were abundant, especially in Quality's next book, *Crack Comics*, which appeared in May 1940.

The premiere issue showcased the split-second adventures of THE CLOCK. For some reason, dull-witted comic writers always drew their heroes from the same occupations. No crimebuster was ever a plumber or a hearing aid salesman or a TV repairman by day and a cloaked, grim-visaged stalker of evil by night. Nope! They were either beat-pounding cops, district attorneys frustrated by red tape, or affluent, ne'er-do-well playboys. The Clock was no different.



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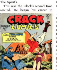
He fell into the last category. Whenever wealthy man-about-town Brian O'Brien got ticked off about criminal activity, he became The Clock. Except for the name, he could have been the pulps' Phantom Detective. He chose to do his crime-crushing in a business suit (or tuxedo) and hat. His identity was hidden behind a black cloth face-mask that eventually became an eye-mask like The Spirit's.

This was the Clock's second time around. He began his career in *Funny Pages* in November 1936, a feat which accredits him the honor of being the comics' first masked manhunter. His accomplice was a young lady named Butch who wore a green sweat shirt, plaid skirt and matching tam o'shanter.



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The Clock's creator, George Brenner, did his best work on this series. Where Bozo had been very linear and two-dimensional, The Clock worked up a minimum depth of field. The fact is, "Busy" Arnold liked the strip more than the readers, who could watch Batman or The Spirit do the same thing better. So The Clock's time ran out in *Crack* 35, February 1944. Yet even during his best period he ran second to THE BLACK CONDOR.

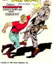
Lou Fine took off with the Black Condor in the first issue of *Crack Comics*. "A flying enemy of all evil, the Black Condor also doubles for murdered Senator Tom Wright, an impersonation known only to Dr. Foster, father of Wendy, the dead Senator's fiancee!" The splash caption explained it all!

The Condor's costume design deserves mention if only for the fact that it served a functional purpose. The blue-black outfit featured a pair of glider-like wings beneath each arm which stretched from the torso to the wristbands. Whenever the Black Condor spread his arms, they assisted in his flight which lasted a total of 31 issues. The Condor's wings, incidentally, pre-dated Captain Midnight's similar sky-diving apparatus.

The character was strictly run-of-the-mill; it was Fine's superb art work that made the series a soaring standout. Charlie Sultan, John Cassone, John Belfi and Al Tyler all lent their quills to the birdman of Quality. The Clock and The Condor appeared alternately on covers for the first 20 issues of *Crack* but they shared the spotlight on the inside with another top quality crime-wrecker.

"He hunts the biggest of all game—criminals beyond the strong arm of the law!! This is Tom Hallaway—ALIAS THE SPIDER!" He was another of Quality's bow and arrow characters (most publishers had them but Quality broke the one-to-a-customer rule). Like the pulp Spider, this strip made no use of webs or wall crawling gimmicks. The yellow and blue garbed hero was nothing more than a conventional genre piece, but, similar to The Condor, the art made the difference. You see, it was Paul Gustavson who gave the Spider his legs.

If a poll were taken to ascertain the foremost golden age comic artists, the name of Gustavson would certainly be near the top, alongside Everett, Guardineer, Biro, and Novick. Besides his obvious talent for drawing and telling stories in panel format, two reasons become immediately evident.



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The first is the number of publishers for which he worked and the volume he produced for them: The Arrow (1938-41), Fantom of the Fair (1939-40), A-Man (1941), Man Of War (1941-42) and The Black Panther (1941) for Centaur; The Angel (1939-42) and Super Slave (1941) for Timely; The Twister (1941) for Novelty Press; Rusty

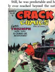
Ryan (1940-43), Quicksilver (1941-42), The Jester (1941-43), Alias The Spider (1940-43), Magno (1941), The Human Bomb (1941-46), Midnight (1942-46) and others for Quality.

The second reason for Gustavson's lasting popularity was the fact that he almost always signed his name (or his pseudonym, Paul Carrol) to the strips he drew. Comic readers looked for and remembered their favorite artists, often reading their strips out of loyalty. The decision not to sign a strip resulted in obscuring the careers (and popularity) of many fine draftsmen like Mac Raboy, Carmine Infantino, Charlie Sultan and George Tuska.

Yet these factors would have been meaningless without a solid and satisfying artistic style to offer. Gustavson wasn't an overnight success; like most artists he worked his way up from the bottom.

Gustavson's approach to comic art was brisk, idealistic and generally consistant. Though he never developed the stylistic flourishes of artists like Fine and Meskin,or the stunning realism of Crandall and Kida, his work combined seasoned professionalism with a natural flow of narrative. From the best (The Jester) to the worst (Man of War), Gustavson gave his super heroes a straight, reverant treatment that always lifted them a cut or two above the ordinary.

Still, he was predictable and hardly ever reached beyond the natural limits of his style. There were flaws to be sure. Side-by-side, it would be difficult to tell the Human Bomb from The Spider in their civilian guises. Gustavson worked in almost every area, from heroic adventure to humor, from crime to westerns, with the same expert technical proficiency. The result was a series of fragmented classics in the great tradition of comics.


MARCH No.38
CRACK COMICS
10¢
Captain TRIUMPH sails into A CARGO OF MYSTERY!

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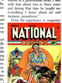
Born in Aland, Finland on August 16, 1916, Karl Paul Gustafson (he traded the "f" for a "v" when he began in comics) came to the United States at age five with his family. After graduating from Quentin High School in New York City and studying engineering and surveying at Cooper Union, Gustavson found himself in the art business.

He became an apprentice to cartoonist Frank Owen who had married a girl Gustavson knew in his native Finland. Owen was under contract to *Collier's Magazine* to produce a humor spot called Filbert. "I was about 17 at the time," Gustavson recalls, "and Owen got me started as a professional artist. I was with him about two or three years and during that time he taught me everything I know about art and business procedures."

From his experience in magazine cartooning, Gustavson made his way into comics. He broke into the field at the Harry "A" Chesler shop on 28th Street and 5th Avenue in Manhattan doing backgrounds and inking. "I started at $12 a week. It wasn't much but in those days it was enough for me. I stayed with Chesler about 2 years and, during that time, worked with people like Jack Cole, Mort Meskin, Gill Fox, Fred Guardineer, Charlie Biro and Bob Wood."



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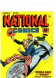
Gustavson spent his spare time reading the classics. With the time that remained, he got married and started raising a family. Then, he moved to the Funnies, Inc. shop where he created The Angel for a new comic titled *Marvel Mystery* and The Arrow, A-Man, Fantom of the Fair, and Man of War for Centaur (on the last strip, he collaborated with his brother Nils). After several years he packed up his pencils and brushes and moved to the Quality studios after "Busy" Arnold offered him $25 a page.

He unleashed a legion of original characters like Rusty Ryan, The Twister, The Jester, Human Bomb and The Spider besides working on Plastic Man and humor strips like Will Bragg. Gustavson produced two super hero pages a day or three or four humor pages (small wonder he switched completely to humor strips by the mid-40's—they paid the same page rate).


MARCH No.30
NATIONAL COMICS
10¢
UNCLE SAM and BUDDY BURST THROUGH IN ANOTHER SMASH STORY!

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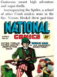
Then, Gustavson's career was interrupted by World War 2. He served in the Air Tech Training Command from 1942 to 1945, during which he studied aerodynamics at Rutgers University. Nils joined the 5th Airborne Division and was shipped to Italy. Upon his return, Gustavson picked up where he left off at Quality and continued with them until the early 50's on strips like Arizona Raines, then to the ACG outfit for a time doing humor features like Cookie, Katie, Kilroy, Squirrely, Solid Jackson, and others. Later, the failing comic market prompted Gustavson to leave the field for more secure employment as a surveyor and engineer for the state of New York.

The days, the years of criminal masterminds and colorful heroes faded into the past, gone but never forgotten by a generation of comic readers to whom the signature of Gustavson meant high adventure and super-thrills.

Accompanying the Spider, a school of other *Crack* sizzlers were in the fire. Vernon Henkel drew part-time diplomatic courier and man of mystery, DON Q. Former U.S. Navy officer Jim Lockhart invented a man-sized, flying, floating machine and became THE RED TORPEDO. Artist Henry Kiefer sank him in the first 20 issues. Fred Guardineer again waved his magic wand and produced TOR, MAGIC MASTER. The incongruous miracle man disguised his identity of Jim Slade, press photographer, by slipping into an inverness cape and paste-on moustache. Like all of Guardineer's conjurers, he also said his magic words backwords.


NATIONAL COMICS
10¢
APRIL No.21
EXTRA THRILLS EXTRA EXCITEMENT IN THIS ISSUE
UNCLE SAM IN HIS GREATEST ADVENTURE!

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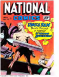
Bob Turner created HACK O'HARA, the tough, trouble-prone New York cabbie whose tales read like crime-pulp thrillers. Eagle squadron pilot, Tex Adams, better known as SPITFIRE, was launched by artist Aldon McWilliams. Other Quality quickies included LEE PRESTON OF THE RED CROSS, SPACE LEGION, and WIZARD WELLS.

More than any other publisher, Quality persisted in presenting a variety of hero types using every conceivable combination of gimmick, costume and origin. Hero themes were contrived from animals, birds, bugs, inanimate objects, the elements, patriotism, minerals, fire, even the time of day. (No water character was in evidence, but then, Bill Everett never worked for Quality.) But the prize for reaching the all-time, consummate, last-word, 100% ultimate achievement in hero gimmicks belongs, now and forever, to Quality for their originality and imagination in publishing MADAM FATAL— comic's first transvestite crimeslapper. Honest! As they had us believe, once great character actor Richard Stanton donned his schiksa outfit and sallied forth to purse and heels as the grand old dyke of justice, Madam Fatal. The creator will go mercifully unnamed to protect the guilty.


NATIONAL COMICS
MAY No.32
10¢
UNCLE SAM Bursts Through in Another STIRRING ADVENTURE!

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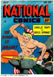
Still, with all this going for it, *Crack* lacked a solid cohesive block-buster to hold the book together. And, in a flash of lightning, CAPTAIN TRIUMPH appeared. He began with the traditional origin story in issue 27 drawn by Alfred Andriola (of Kerry Drake newspaper strip fame). The concept behind Captain Triumph was a combination of Quality's Strange Twins and the Invisible Justice. The former was an interesting but unsuccessful series which pitted two look-alike brothers, one a Scotland Yard Detective, the other a master criminal, against each other. The latter was an invisible crimefighter.

This time, the twins are Michael and Lance Gallant (the civilian name that ended them all) who are identical even to the T-shaped birthmark on the inside of their right wrists. When Michael is killed in an explosion, Lance takes the usual vow to bring those responsible to justice. At that, the spirit of Michael materializes and gives his brother the powers of flight and invulnerability. He explains that Lance has only to rub the strange birthmark and with that, the two figures, one mortal, one spirit, merge to become Captain Triumph.



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The concept was startling and unique, a requirement necessary for any superhero, especially one who got such a late start. It worked like this: while Lance was in his straight mortal form, Michael (printed in a solid black outline but colored in a pale ghostly blue) could roam about at will. He would eavesdrop on criminals and report back to Lance. Yet he was powerless to perform physical deeds.

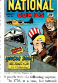
The formula was filled out further by introducing Michael's fiancee, Kim Meredith. In an early story, she too could see Michael's spirit form but the idea was soon dropped. She becomes Lance's constant companion in adventure along with sandy-haired Biff Banks.

Besides the concept of Captain Triumph, the costume also warrants mention because of its utter simplicity. Triumph wore nothing more than a red unadorned tee-shirt, white riding pants and brown boots. Quality's editors must have realized that readers would find the new outfit a blessed relief from every conceivable type of mask, cowl, cape, chest emblem and identifying capital letter already on the overcrowded market. They were right!

Captain Triumph emerged victorious over the Black Condor and his cronies. He held that position until the last battle was over in September 1949, issue 62. After Andriola, Ruben Moriera, Mort Leav, Alex Kotsky, Al Bryant and Reed Crandall took a crack at Triumph, each doing some of his most memorable work on the strip.

It was obvious that every title, to be a success, demanded a strong leading feature be served up as the main course, while the ever-changing minor strips were only *hors d'oeuvres*. The maxim held true for Quality's next book, *National Comics*, which appropriately was inaugurated in July 1940.

*National's* nonpareil newcomer came striding out of the first story's splash page, waving a patriotic salute to the reader. His name was embellished by enough stars and stripes to make a fourth of July fireworks display. Surrounding him was a capsule history of America told in 9 panels with the following caption:



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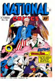
"In 1776, as a new, but tattered flag was hoisted over the 13 states, a new spirit was born—a spirit that grew until 48 states became united under one flag! Out of this spirit, like a guiding father, came UNCLE SAM, as Americans fondly named him, to watch over the destinies of growing America!

"He carried the flag in the Civil War, in the trenches of 1917, fighting to preserve the principles of democracy—and once again, 21 years after Americans had first shed their blood, so that a system of government offering freedom, equality and the pursuit of happiness, might be preserved! The forces of evil, greed, intolerance and crime, threaten the very ideal out of which America's greatest character was born!"



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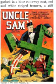
The story of the comics' premier patriot (Captain America would altruistically appear almost a year later) was told in 100 panels on 9 pages. The tale introduced a maniacal dictator and his followers, the Purple Shirts. Their symbol: a fiery sword over a cross. Their creed: to enslave the United States.

Their activities are aimed at the "Oakies," a group of southwestern migrating camp workers. The Purple Shirts begin their litany of evil and hatred by inciting the poor but honest hard-working folk to violent dissent. One of the "Oakies," Ezra Smith resists their tactics and is shot in the back by a subversive traitor.

In a state of anguish, Smith's son, Buddy, wanders out into the desert to mourn his father's death. Through his sobs of despair, he hears the sound of whistling floating across the desert night—the whistling, a tune familiar to every schoolboy—Yankee Doodle Dandy.

Suddenly, a tall figure with white wavy hair and white beard stands before the sobbing youth, a figure garbed in a blue cut-away coat, red and white striped trousers, a stiff collar shirt, bow-tie, and a tall red, white and blue silk hat. "Now, now, little man, you're not really crying? Men don't cry, you know! Tell your Uncle Sam about it!"


UNCLE
SAM
FOUR TERRIFIC STORIES STARRING THE WORLD'S GREATEST HERO!

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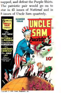
"Whose Uncle are you?" the boy asks pensively.

"Everyone's Uncle—every American boy is my nephew!"

Wow!! What kid could resist a pitch like that? Not Buddy and certainly not Quality's enthusiastic readership.

As expected, the two team up to save the president who was kidnapped, and defeat the Purple Shirts. The patriotic pair would go on to star in 45 issues of *National* and in 8 issues of *Uncle Sam* quarterly.



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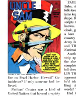
An immediate sensation, Uncle Sam was the creation of Will Eisner, and the first of Quality's heroes to be promoted to his own book (Fall 1941). The saga of Sam was inspired by several sources. He was the comic version of James Montgomery Flagg's World War I "I Want You!" recruiting poster. The complete costume, down to the last detail, ran on the cover of *Liberty Magazine*, January 19, 1935.

The opening story was obviously influenced by John Steinbeck's classic *Grapes of Wrath* or more precisely by John Ford's 1940 film version of the "Oakies." The concept of Uncle Sam and his purpose apparently springs from Henry Fonda's closing lines in the film. The Purple Shirts were a variation of a theme featured by pulp character Operator 5 and his epic encounter with the Purple Invasion.

Idealistically tall and muscled, Sam constantly sprang to America's defense when invaders or saboteurs threatened. Uncle Sam could leap great distances, had super strength and (a neat touch) couldn't be photographed. The source of his power was the belief of the American people and for each individual who stopped believing, some of that power was lost. Uncle Sam fought his last adventure in December 1944, his star-spangled career coinciding judiciously with that of the war.

After Eisner, Quality's foremost luminaries worked on the series: Lou Fine, Mort Leav, Reed Crandall, John Celardo, George Tuska, Gill Fox, Art Seymour, Al Gabriele, Alex Kotsky and others. Otto Binder, who scripted the origin tale was followed by Bill Woolfolk and Harry Stein who wrote intelligent, action-filled tales, some of Quality's best.

Issue 18 dated December 1941 (on sale months before) was particularly notable. Harry Stein scripted the following opening sequence, "Guam Island, United States Naval Base is raided by Oriental bombers —at the same time enemy warships fire on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii!" Coincidence? If only someone had believed.



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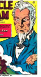
*National Comics* was a kind of United Nations that housed a variety of adventure strips. "A crime busting speed demon who strikes with force compared only to lightning—this is QUICKSILVER, King of Speed!" Billed as the laughing Robin Hood, Quality's speed demon wore an all-blue outfit with a white shirt and red mask. No one ever figured out the mask bit because he had no alter ego, he was Quicksilver all the time. Nick Viscardi created the strip which then raced to Jack Cole, Lou Fine, Paul Gustavson and Fred Guardineer. His track record boasted a long run in *National*, from November 1940 to August 1949.

Viscardi also drew WONDER BOY, the red and blue clad kid from another planet with the strength of a dozen men. SALLY O'NEIL-POLICEWOMAN was *National's* token girl strip. Sunshine and THE KID PATROL satisfied the group theme. JACK AND JILL were Quality's answer to Nick and Nora Charles, sleuthing—married style. In the aviation area, coast guard pilot PROP POWERS got his wings. And boxing champ, KID DIXON, learned the ropes in *National's* pages before he took the count.



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PAUL BUNYAN and his Blue ox, Babe, showed up to represent the folk-lore department. Aldon McWilliams kept DESTROYER 171 in shipshape. Bernie Klein drew Ted Udall's scripts to make THE UNKNOWN known. In his blue jodphurs, red cloak, gray boots and gloves, he was a hero without a name, without a country and without a shirt. G-2 of Army Intelligence, CHIC CARTER, and THE WHISTLER were other *National* notables.

Another Fred Guardineer magic strip appeared to take its turn in the show too. (Would a book be complete without one?) In his purple full dress suit and green cloak, MERLIN THE MAGICIAN battled Nazi oppression with miraculous powers he'd inherited from his ancestor in King Arthur's court. His magic words? That's right! Backwards.

Had Guardineer's magicians met in a single strip, dialogue would have gone something like this:

Merlin: "Ih ereht!"

Tor: "Olleh! S'woh skcirt?"

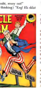
Merlin: "T'ndluoc eb retteb!"

Tor: (thinking) "Eeg! Eh sklat ynnuf!"

Merlin: "Yas, ruoy ehcatsuom skool taerg!"

Tor: "Sknaht, sruoy oot!"

Merlin: (thinking) "Eeg! Eh sklat ynnuf!"



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Tor: "Yeh, ereh semoc aratZ!"

Zatara: "Ih, swollef, s'woh skcirt?"

Merlin: "Tsuj enif!"

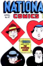
Zatara: "Tog ot teg emos wen riah emerc! Siht s'ffuts yaerg!"

Merlin and Tor: "KO! Ees uoy retal!"

Zatara: (thinking) "Eeg! Yeht klat ynnuf!"

Guardineer had a rare one-of-a-kind style that was neither imitative nor imitated. He took a strong, straightforward narrative line that made each story a pleasure to read. Guardineer was especially sensitive to the visual form. His art was heavily dependent upon design, not over-rendered detail. Compositions, of necessity, were strong and simple, requiring color to separate shapes in the foreground from the background, all of which were treated with an identical outline.

His drawing was extremely stylized and non-naturalistic; yet the stylization took the form of a highly conscious combination of simplicity and linear design. While Guardineer's style was unusually consistent and direct, it also had its weak points. For one thing, the static geometric panels sometimes lacked vitality; action scenes often looked passive. His decision to express narrative flow in the simplest terms meant depicting the obvious. Still, he made the obvious tasteful, with good drawing and clean, precise inking.



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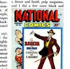
Guardineer's ultra-tight line and cool, impersonal graphics invested his work with a documentary-like quality which he would use to his advantage during his crime comics period. You either liked him or you didn't, but you couldn't ignore him. One thing is certain—in the history of comics, Guardineer is one of the architects who built the golden age.

His career, like his drawing style, seems much simpler than it really was. That career began in the fall of 1935 when Fred Guardineer left his hometown of Albany, New York. Armed only with a diploma from Syracuse University, he arrived in Manhattan with the hope of earning a living as an illustrator despite the current depression in that field as well as others. On the day he arrived, he found a room on 34th Street near the Armory and a few months later moved to the Hotel Latham on 28th Street. Fortunately his family had staked him to room and board because it was 14 months before he secured a job with regular pay and was officially on his own.

"My first break," Guardineer recalls, "was a chapter heading for a Street and Smith pulp magazine, and I did a few more black and whites for Popular Publications, Magazine Publishers and Pines Publications. I now had samples of published work which later got me a job in the comic book business. At the time I had never even heard about them. I was, of course, familiar with newspaper comic strips and thought that this type of medium would be up my alley, so to speak.



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"In November of 1936, weary of pounding pavements, and ready to give it up, I took one last crack at a New York Times ad and was hired to draw pages for comic books being brought out by Harry "A" Chesler. It was twenty bucks a week. I was glad to get it and I loved the work, drawing everything, such as Indians, cowboys, gangsters, south sea adventurers and monsters from space. By February of 1938, I was making thirty dollars a week, had a bank account and hosted a few parties they still talk about at the Hotel Latham.

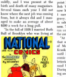
"While working in Chesler's stable I met many artists who became famous later on in the comic book business such as Fred Schwab, Ken Ernst, Bob Wood and Charlie Biro. On the side I did a job for Major Wheeler-Nicholson who started the line that would later become National Comics. I did an epic entitled Boomerang Jones and am still waiting for my thirty dollars pay. However, my dealings with the Major

brought me in contact with Ogden Whitney, Craig Flessel, Whitney Ellsworth and Vincent Sullivan, all of whom starred later in this business.

"In the spring of 1938, comic books had swept the country and were big business with *Detective Comics* taken over from Major Nicholson by Harry Donenfeld. Mr. Donenfeld set up such features as Superman, then I left Harry Chesler to work here and became well known for drawing Zatara the Magician in *Action Comics*. I was strictly freelance now, on my own, and drawing day and night.

"For the next 20 years, with the exception of two years in the Army, I handled every conceivable subject matter, did the best I could in the time available and never missed a deadline. I was also lucky that my natural style always reproduced well. The business was unsteady, to put it mildly, and I was present at the birth and death of many magazines. Several times each year I did not know where the next job was coming from, but it always did and I managed to make an average of about $200 a week for a long pull.

"In the fall of 1938 I married Ruth Ball of Brooklyn who was living at the Hotel Latham and studying medicine at Bellevue Hospital. We did a year in a Brooklyn apartment and then bought a house in Babylon, Long Island.



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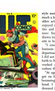
"From 1941 to March 1944, when I was drafted into the World War 2 army, I turned out pages for "Busy" Arnold's Quality Comic group. Among these were the space-age Blue Tracer, The Marksman and Merlin the Magician.

"In the army I was assigned as an artist to a printing plant, but in reality served as a rifleman with a shovel. I did, however, considerable art work for the army in the Philippines. I shared the same tent with numerous spiders, lizards and Ogden Whitney.



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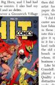
"After my discharge in February of 1946, I found no job waiting for me at Arnold's stable, but I made out well free-lancing for Hillman Periodicals, Comic House, Cinema Comics and Famous Funnies. At this point I met up with my old buddies, Bob Wood and Charlie Biro, who now had their own magazines, and I moved in on the crime comic gravy. Crime comics were now tops in sales and a very lucrative business. Then, in 1952, the do-gooders ran comic books off the stands and the entire industry began to collapse.

"At this point my trail crossed that of my old friend Vin Sullivan of Magazine Enterprises and Ray Krank, his editor. For three years, until 1955, I did the Durango Kid comic book, covers, pages and lettering. It was worth about a thousand bucks a month, every month. During this period I started a hunting and fishing column in the Babylon weekly newspaper, had a fishing boat and was active in local affairs.

"The Durango Kid paid well, and although I gave it my all, it was no competition to television which was then sweeping the land. After three years he went down like Custer at the Little Big Horn, and I had had it with the comics. I also had my first nickel and no debts.



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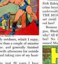
"I was never a Greenwich Village style sociable artist, and was pretty much a loner. I didn't fraternize with other artists after work, although I enjoyed my colleagues at office parties and such. Most of my friends were from other professions, but drawn together by our mutual interests in hunting and fishing.

"I could have stayed in the art business if I took jobs in various art departments of newspapers, etc., but I did not want to commute back and forth to New York City. I had always worked at home and only had to endure the city about once a week.

"At age 42, I made a switch and got on the government payroll by becoming a mailman in my neighborhood. I soon found my talents in demand for posters and manual illustrations. It has been a nice healthy job, mainly outdoors, which I enjoy, never more than a couple of minutes from home, and generally finished by noon, with afternoons for outside interests and taking care of my hunting dogs.



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"For the past 20 years, I have written hunting and fishing columns for several local papers. I was on the payroll of a daily paper for about six months as outdoor writer, then did two and a half years as an artist for historical material. The paper didn't last more than three years, however.

"I did five years as a radio broadcaster and I can say that I was the best fishing and hunting broadcaster in these parts. A lot of work went into this and unfortunately I had to give it up as there was no money in it for me. Working for Long Island radio stations reminded me of the old days in comics. Sort of a bunch of sharpies, compared to whom, the fly-by-nights in the art business were pillars of industry."

Like his co-workers, Eisner, Fine, Crandall and the others, Guardineer played a conspicuous part in the Quality machine. His product was distinctive, polished (but not tediously slick) and entertaining. Altogether, a credit to a difficult (and often impossible) profession.

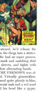
Humor fillers like WINDY BREEZE, MISS WINKY, CYCLONE CUPID and SALTY WATERS punctuated *National's* pages with laughs. Like all Quality's publications, this one would also shift its emphasis as the adventure-hero trend faded into oblivion. But until then, super strips appeared with predictable regularity. *Hit Comics* was released simultaneously with *National*.

Of all the Quality titles, *Hit* carried the best covers. *Crack*, *Smash* and others always ran inserts of four characters in stars or circles on covers, leaving a minimum of space for the major feature. In fact, Arnold would have these character spots and the title lettering redrawn every month, instead of reproduced photo-mechanically, even though they remained exactly the same.

Not so with *Hit*, which had some of the most exciting and best drawn covers in the comic chronology. Three more Quality crime-stoppers took turns sharing the cover spotlight for the opening 25 issues.

"Assistant to the District Attorney, Rick Raleigh carries his fight against crime beyond courtroom doors as the underworld's most dreaded enemy—THE RED BEE!" If the Green Hornet could be a success, why not a red bee?

Because the Hornet had a gas gun, Black Beauty and Kato, that's why! All the Red Bee had was . . . a bee! No foolin'!! He kept a bee named Michael in his belt and when crooks threatened, he'd release the bee to throw the thugs into a skittering panic. He had no super powers, only a red mask and matching shirt with filmy sleeves, and tights with red and yellow alternating bands.



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NEON THE UNKNOWN was almost as bad. Virtually gimmickless, he was dressed quite plainly in blue, with a red waist sash and a red scarf tied around his head like a gypsy. It billowed freely behind him like a cloak. He had no dual identity and

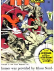
◁ A superb example of the Lou Fine technique on The RED BEE.

could fly, fight or perform any manifestation he desired with the aid of a mysterious neonic ray. The art for Neon and the Bee was extremely competent but the concept and scripts were uninspired and threadbare, definitely not material of Uncle Sam or Doll Man caliber.

HERCULES was the third *Hit* hero. Blonde, super-strongman, Joe Hercules pitted his strength against the usual bad guys for 21 issues. Most publishers exploited the mythological muscle characters at one time or another, but this one had Crandall, Fine, and Tuska to help him perform the labors of Hercules!

Henry Kiefer's pseudo-science strip, BLAZE BARTON was considerably more entertaining if only due to its scantily clad, G-strung women. CASEY JONES–Engineer and THE STRANGE TWINS were well-drawn straight adventure strips as were X-5, JACK AND JILL and HELL DIVER.

Kiefer also contributed LION BOY, a lost-lad-in-the-jungle-adopted-by-lions strip. Al Bryant's BETTY BATES, Lady At Law was generally a solid readable feature. Art Peddy depicted two-fisted, undefeated boxing champ, DON GLORY, while humor was provided by Klaus Nordling's BOB AND SWAB, Gustavson's BILL THE MAGNIFICENT, and Art Gates' WOOPY OF SHOOTIN' CREEK.



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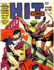
"Rip Graves, reported dead in the first World War, learns he is honored as the Unknown Soldier! From beneath the crypt he battles for his country as the GHOST OF FLANDERS!" George Brenner, signing his name Wayne Reid, created this series which ran 8 issues.

Ensign Jack Smith played Captain Nemo by constructing a one-man sub and becoming THE SWORDFISH. Guardineer used the name "Perry Scope" to sign this neat, short-run actioner. No, Smith did not speak his orders backwards! Vernon Henkel was represented by another airplane strip, COMET KELLY, as was Alex Blum with CAPTAIN FLAGG, LEATHERNECK.



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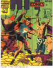
STORMY FOSTER, THE GREAT DEFENDER was another offbeat *Hit* hero. Issue 18 introduced mild-mannered drug store clerk Foster (maybe those writers were right after all!!). He could have been cut from the same pattern that Clark Kent was fashioned after–dark haired, bespectacled and meek with an ego-debilitating job. During the course of his duties, he discovers a super-vitamin capsule that endows him with incredible strength and a small black moustache (supposedly for disguise).

Because a soda jerk's salary is modest, Foster's outfit was in keeping with his income. He sported a blue tee-shirt with a white star on the chest, a crimson cloak, no mask, white tennis shorts, socks and blue sneakers. Truthfully, he looked more like a patriotic track star than a super hero. Yet it was all easily overlooked with artists like Crandall, Palais, Fine and others doing magnificent renderings on covers and interiors from issues 18 to 34.

As you may have guessed (and as Quality's editors knew), *Hit* was going to be a miss unless someone came up with a winner soon. They knew that if things continued this way for long, all the heroes in the world wouldn't. . .



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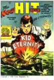
Wait a minute!! All the heroes in the world! Of course!

Why not create a strip wherein every hero in history could be recalled to fight crime in modern times–*A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, in reverse. A great idea but perhaps a little too pedestrian for tastes that had been spoon fed on Supermen.

Simple! You want more for your money–add the heroes of mythology, every one since the beginning of eternity! (What a name for a strip!) Toss in the usual hero and sidekick and a touch of the supernatural, like they were doing in movies such as *It's a Wonderful Life* and *On Borrowed Time*–perfect! But this time let the kid be the hero and the adult be the assistant.



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Terrific! If we hurry, we can get it into issue 25!

The result was a 15-page story that began in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, aboard a merchant ship carrying rubber and crude oil. A boy in a red sash and cap, white shirt and gray trousers scans the horizon with a telescope. The boy spots a prowling submarine and alerts the crew who begin to shell the sub.

Moments later, an enemy torpedo hits the ship, killing the boy's grandfather and drowning the passengers. The U-boat surfaces to machine gun any survivors. A passing destroyer investigates and discovers everyone, including the boy, dead.

The scene changes; the kid and his grandfather are standing on a vast plane of clouds. Ahead of them, a golden stairway rises upward between tall pillars. They climb the stairs and soon join others going through the gates at the top. Then they're stopped by a white-robed figure who claims the kid's name isn't on his list. He calls upon his aide, Mr. Keeper, for an explanation. They discover the kid is not due yet for 75 years and decide he must return to earth to live again.

Back in the Atlantic, the destroyer's crew have just buried the kid's body at sea. The ethereal Mr. Keeper claps his hands, causing the kid to return to his body and live again. He's asked to repeat a vow–"Justice shall not perish from the realm of the living! It shall exist throughout eternity!"

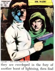
Upon the final word, a bolt of lightning cracks the skies and sends them through the corridor of time, revealing all the greatest deeds of history and mythology. Mr. Keeper offers to make amends for his mistakes.

"You want to be a combination of all the great deeds and great men of the past! And that, you already are! You have the strength and power of all great men of the past, as long as you speak the magic word and call on them, but your job will be the hardest of the lot! Yours is going to be greater than all the rest –because your job is to fight the future and all its ills!

"When you speak the magic word, you shall be able to call on any person in mythology or history! They shall come and you shall enter their body and battle in that form. Also, you shall make your body appear as a ghost or as a living person! Your powers are unlimited, kid–and we know you will use them to the best advantage! Say it, kid–speak the magic word! For you are KID ETERNITY!"

"ETERNITY!"

As the kid says the magic word, they are enveloped in the fury of another burst of lightning, then find themselves back on earth, ready for any task by which they might serve the cause of justice.



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In the following issue, Kid Eternity and the ever-present Mr. Keeper score a victory over the sinister Dr. Pain by recalling Achilles, Robin Hood and Blackhawk. Admittedly, it took the writers a while to brush up on their history and create situations that demanded exactly the right individual from the past to be summoned.

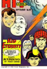
The combination of heroes and history lessons worked like a charm with readers, the Kid and his Keeper enduring an eternity of adventures in *Hit* until issue 60, September, 1949. In addition, the super-specters starred in 18 issues of their own book. Shelly Moldoff drew the first Eternity tale then turned the immortals over to Ruben Moreira, Alex Kotsky, and Al Bryant who really carved a place in history for them.

An interesting sidelight about the strip is that two of the characters in the *Hit* 28 Kid Eternity tale emerged to star in a series of their own. Her Highness was an old, white-haired grandma and her companion, Silk, was a sexy, long-legged brunette who favored skin-tight dresses. Both were in jail.

With malice aforethought, they escape, but decide to return after their encounter with Kid Eternity and company. In that same issue, the lady con artists began their own miss-adventures which lasted until *Hit* 58. Not a bad play for a pair of queens.

*Police Comics* showed up next in Quality's line-up, August 1941. A column of four badges on the left of the cover introduced a quartet of gangbusters to be found inside. The remainder of the cover depicted a "smashing new character" which the editors wanted the reader to be on the lookout for.

Clad in scarlet tights and mask with a blue transparent shirt, Reed Crandall's FIREBRAND kept his lead position for a year of sizzling super-thrillers. The crimson crimecrusher was the alter ego of naval reserve officer Rod Reilly, a secret known only to his manservant, Slugger Dunn. Because he had no super powers, Firebrand's potential cooled quickly and the use of other artists turned him into a dying ember by issue 13.



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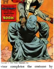
Of course, Plastic Man became the unrivaled lead feature thereafter. He was aided and abetted by a host of stellar strips like the explosive HUMAN BOMB.

Paul Gustavson lit the fuse in *Police* 1 with a tale that described how scientific genius, Roy Lincoln, discovers a highly destructive chemical compound. When Axis agents attempt to steal the deadly capsule, Lincoln swallows it to prevent the theft (drastic events call for drastic measures). Instead of getting a bad case of indigestion, he becomes a human bomb, whose touch is more devastating than dynamite.

After putting on a pair of gloves, he fashions a heavy, but loose, white, one-piece suit much like an asbestos fire-fighting outfit. A pair of thick gloves and a helmet with an eye visor completes the costume by which Lincoln can protect himself (and conceal his identity) while smashing the citadels of crime. Perhaps the most functional (and interesting) costume in comics, it lent the aspect of credibility to the stories.



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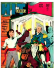
Gustavson's treatment of the character was extremely humane. Whenever the Human Bomb removed his gloves, it was always to smash through a wall, wreck a machine or destroy a weapon. He inevitably put the protective gloves back on during the obligatory hand to hand fights with thugs.

The Human Bomb resembled Timely's Human Torch in a number of ways. The similarity went beyond the names; they were both created in a laboratory, both owed their unnatural powers to scientific experimentation. Where the Torch could turn his entire body into a combustible weapon, the Bomb used only his explosive fists—the same principle only more controlled and concentrated. Both were physical freaks, bearing no resemblance to Captain America or Blackhawk who classified as identical in another area.



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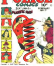
Just as Plastic Man had Woozy, the Human Bomb had Hustace Throckmorton, his scientific partner and scatter-brained sidekick. Throckmorton had the same explosive power as Lincoln—but in his feet. In other words, the Bomb's bespectacled buddy had to take off his shoes and socks to do his stuff. Silly, but funny. For a short period in 1943, Lincoln was joined by the Bombardiers, a trio who also had the power.

Gustavson, who signed the early strips Paul Carrol, detonated almost all the stories from August 1941 to September 1946, giving readers a charge for a total of 58 issues.

The Bomb was joined in his crusade by CHICK CARTER, a police reporter who became THE SWORD for a few issues, then changed his mind; EAGLE EVANS and his photographer pal Snap Smith; and STEVE KERRIGAN, another jailbird on the side of the law.

Kerrigan was a poor man's version of George Brenner's #711 series. #711 was the number assigned to Dan Dyce at Westmoor prison. A lifer serving time for a crime he didn't commit, Dyce discovers a way to get in and out of prison without being caught. Using the jail as his headquarters, he becomes #711, a costumed crime-fighter who returns to his cell after each adventure (talk about rehabilitation). His sentence was terminated abruptly in issue 15 when Dyce was shot and killed.



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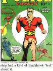
In the next issue, his spot was filled by DESTINY, a rather dull character whose only power was the ability to ferret out crime and violence. Fred Guardineer's THE MOUTHPIECE set no precedent either as young district attorney Bill Perkins donned a spirit-type mask and played detective for 13 issues.

Senator Knight's beautiful daughter, Sandra, became THE PHANTOM LADY, *Police*'s only costumed heroine series. Yet women were in abundance, due to the appearance of THE SPIRIT whose Sunday newspaper thrillers were reprinted as comic book material.

*Police*'s remaining hero was created in the tradition of Fox's Blue Beetle and DC's Guardian. By day, he was Dan Richards, a beat-pounding patrolman, but at night he wore the blue mask and outfit of MANHUNTER. He carried no weapons and was aided by his big dog, Thor. Tex Blaisdell and Alex Kotsky were the writer-artist team for the early stories. Later, Bryant and Cassone took over, which explains why the strip had a kind of Blackhawk "feel" about it.


POLICE COMICS
10¢
PLASTIC MAN!
THE SPIRIT?

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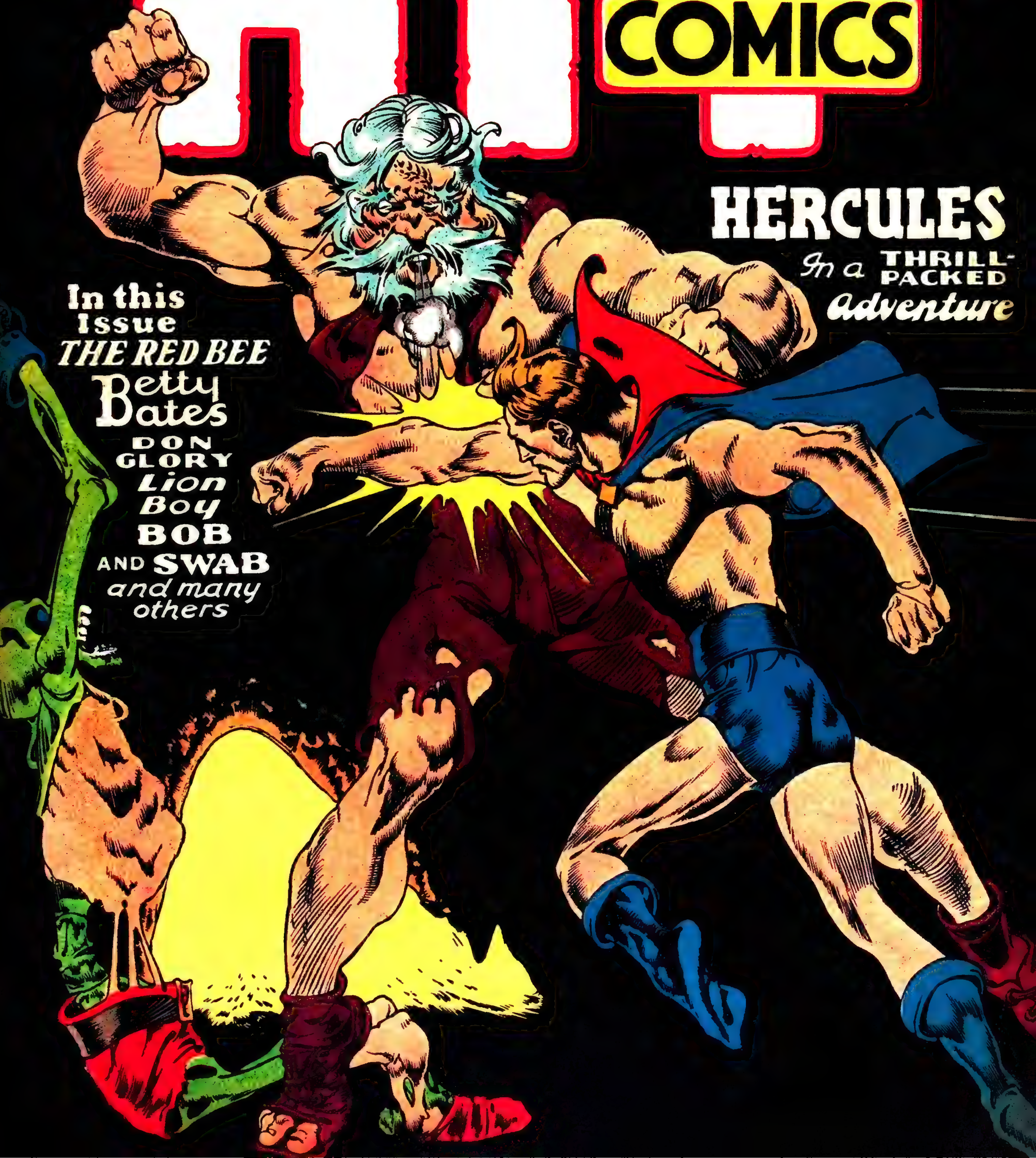
Alex Kotsky was barely finished with high school when he began his career in comics. After submitting his work to various studios (Harry Chesler turned a young, persistent Alex down three times during a single elevator ride), he finally secured a job with Chad Grothkopf in August, 1940. He was making $2.50 a page on strips like DC's Cliff Crosby and The Three Aces and Timely's Destroyer.

His apprenticeship lasted until November 1941, when he started at Tudor City for Quality, working on features like Espionage, Blackhawk, Quicksilver, Uncle Sam, and backgrounds on the Spirit. Later Alex became one of the Johnstone

NOVEMBER No.17

10¢

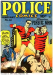
# HIT COMICS


QUALITY COMIC GROUP
HERCULES
In a THRILL-PACKED Adventure
In this Issue
THE RED BEE
Betty Bates
DON GLORY
Lion Boy
BOB AND SWAB
and many others

and Cushing artists along with Milton Caniff, Elmer Wexler, Stan Drake, Gill Fox, Lou Fine, Dik Brown, Joe King, Ken Bald, Len Starr, Craig Flessel and others.

A number of Quality strips benefitted from Kotsky's clean, literal style, one which would later earn him a niche in the field of syndicated newspaper comics.

*Military Comics* made its debut the same month as *Police* (August 1941) and featured an interesting split format. The first half of the book was devoted to Army strips, the second to Navy strips. Blackhawk, of course, was always the lead feature.



*Military's* back-up series also delivered a considerable amount of heavy artillery. Among those, the BLUE TRACER must be considered as one of the highest calibre and most imaginative.

The 5-page origin tale opens to show American engineer, Wild Bill Dunn, the sole survivor of a British scouting expedition in the jungles of Ethiopia. Two panels later, he's found and nursed back to health by Australian soldier, Boomerang Jones. (Of course, he has a boomerang. What else?)

Jones explains that Dunn's patrol was ambushed by M'bujies, superbeings who live in a volcano and intend to conquer the world with their death ray machines. Dunn decides to face the problem in the American way. "Maybe I can build a new kind of fighting machine out of those captured tanks and airplanes! Want to help me?"

"Sure!" Boomerang replies, setting himself up for the old sidekick bit.

Dunn works feverishly for months utilizing captured fascist equipment. Then, "This machine'll fly like an airplane, dive like a submarine and smash into obstacles like a tank!!"

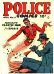
It was completed—a blue bullet-like hull with a red, white and blue bulls-eye painted on its nose. The rear section featured a pair of tank treads, a propeller, a vertical stabilizing fin, and retractable delta wings. All this and a hidden nose cannon plus an arsenal of machine guns mounted on various other sections. The design was nothing less than sensational, easily one of the most beautiful and imaginative machines to emerge from the golden age of comics.

Next, Dunn appears—his costume, blue riding pants and boots, a black shirt with a red and white star insignia, a cloak and a WW1 infantry man's helmet (or an air-raid warden's helmet, for those who remember).

"Seen only as a streak of blue, this newest and most formidable of all modern engines of war, folds its wings and zooms away like a tracer bullet fired from a gigantic cannon—THE BLUE TRACER is born!"

In the remaining pages, Dunn puts the machine through a baptism of fire destroying the volcanic supercity and its inhabitants in an avalanche of burning lava. Oh, yes, he saves the captive white girl too! All in 5 pages!!

The Blue Tracer survived 16 adventures including one that featured its German counterpart, the Nazi Rocket Tank. Dunn defeated it with the help of our "Russian allies." Yet The Blue Tracer couldn't survive the editorial decision to drop the strip to make room for the approaching humor trend.

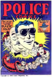


More *Military* might was mustered by Jack Cole's DEATH PATROL strip and Klaus Nordling's SHOT AND SHELL, Colonel Sam Shot and Slim Shell. The 4-page story opened as the Colonel walked into a recruiting station. "I assume sir, the Air Corps needs MEN!"

The answer, "That's right—have you seen any?"

The two characters scored a skyfull of smiles as they foiled nazi agents with cracks and crack-ups in the Marx Brothers style.

Writer Ted Udall introduced another *Military* manhunter in issue 5. Dressed in green from head to toe like Robin Hood, THE SNIPER was exactly what his name implied. The usual bow and arrow, however, was replaced with a high-powered rifle which he used for picking off Axis invaders from rooftops, often shooting them in the back. Vernon Henkel drew most of the series which spanned issues 5 through 34.

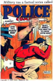


*Military's* Navy section flew the colors of two girl strips, MISS AMERICA and X OF THE UNDERGROUND. The former was drawn by Elmer Wexler and starred Joan Dale, a girl reporter who was endowed with magic powers by the Statue of Liberty. The latter featured a lady spy of many disguises in the service of her country.

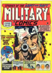
Fred Kida's PHANTOM CLIPPER made use of an interesting idea. "A harmless clipper they called her—but beneath her disguise lay the iron and steel of a mighty warship manned by a daring crew as ferocious as their skipper's name—Tiger Shark!"

Henry Kiefer's Q-BOAT strip was drawn with enough detail to satisfy any Navy aficionado as was LOOPS 'N' BANKS of the U. S. Marines. Captain Loops McCann and Lieutenant Banks Barrows were another of Bob Powell's turbulent twosomes—with plenty of humor and great art, too.

*Military* ran a factual series called SECRET WAR NEWS. True encounters with the enemy were beautifully rendered (often from photographs) by Alden McWilliams. A one-pager titled ATLANTIC (or PACIFIC) PATROL followed. PT BOAT utilized a kind of Mister Roberts approach with two ensigns and a Navy nurse. *Military*, then *Smash*, presented YANKEE EAGLE, the saga of globe-trotting Jerry Noble and his eagle, Sam.



*Police* and *Military* were the last of Quality's comic anthologies, making a total of seven books and hundreds of characters. The Quality editorial policy was centered somewhere between National's high-class, efficient but distant, industrialized look (probably due to the number of editors and unsigned strips) and Timely's highly personal hand-crafted, violently bizarre approach. While the extremes served both companies well, so did the middle ground upon which Quality Publications was based.


STORIES OF THE ARMY AND NAVY
MILITARY
COMICS
JUNE

This is not to imply, however, that Quality was a trend follower instead of a trend setter. On the contrary, they were innovators from the beginning of their "original" comic period, their books reflecting the intelligence and integrity of their staff.

During that early period, Fine, Crandall, Powell, Cole and, of course, Eisner formed the nucleus of the staff. Each was an innovator in his own right. Working together, as if by proximity only, their styles grew, evolved, merged and fused into what could be called the "Quality Style." Each individual contributed an equal share of what he did best and, in turn, learned from the others.

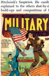
Eisner, who was busy working on The Spirit, created a dozen new characters, coached a bullpen swarming with artists, and made comments and corrections in his capacity as art director at the studio.

He put it this way, "Each of us had a different approach to drawing. For example, a pair of shoes. Lou would make them more realistic by

◁ Lou Fine's cover for *Hit Comics* 17.

adding extra detail like eyelets or stitching. I would add scuffmarks and wrinkles. Crandall might render them photographically, or Cole would distort them outrageously." Their combined pool of knowledge was awesome; other artists and companies tried hard to mimic their look.

While Fine and Crandall were expert draftsmen, Eisner was the storyteller. Alex Kotsky recalls Eisner returning to the shop after seeing Hitchcock's *Suspicion*. He candidly explained to the others shot-by-shot build-ups and compositions of figures framed in lit doorways as shafts of light spilled out across floors. These effects would eventually typify the Eisner look, especially in The Spirit where they were plentifully used.



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Gill Fox was another talent that Eisner hired for the staff. Fox was born in Brooklyn in 1915 and grew up on a diet of the Sunday funnies. One of his favorite strips was Bringing Up Father, a fact which prompted him to visit his idol, George McManus, at the King Features Syndicate office. McManus was having his shoes shined when Fox saw him. "I knew it had to be him. He was dressed just like Jiggs, with spats and stickpin, and smoking a big cigar. It was the highlight of my career!"

Fox studied cartooning and figure drawing at Washington Irving High School and, because he was an athlete himself, began his career with sports cartoons. Before long he landed a job at the Max Fleisher Animation Studios where he worked on Popeye and Betty Boop. The union was getting ready to move in and Fox promptly organized a strike among the artists. He was fired just as promptly.

He made the rounds and joined the Quality crew, drawing fillers like SPORTRAITS and humor features like POISON IVY, CYCLONE CUPID and SUPER SNOOPER in addition to writing sequences and doing backgrounds for other strips. Of course almost everybody pitched in to do bits and pieces, panels, backgrounds, figures, lettering and inking on strips other than their own.

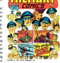
Who knows . . . if a fellow really worked hard, he might go places? During one unusually busy period, Eisner waved him over, "Hey, Gill! C'mere! One minute you're working here on a strip for me, and now I'm working for you!"

"Waddaya mean?"

Eisner needed help and decided to promote him, "You're editor! Answer the phone!" Fox, now editor, answered it.

It was Arnold who explained that Ed Cronin (who was house editor from 1937 to 1940), had just quit to join the Hillman operation. He offered Fox the job at double his present salary. Gill accepted. Who knows? If a fellow . . .

Fox found working for Arnold to be a pleasant experience. Not that "Busy" didn't have a few hang-ups of his own. He liked covers to be drawn almost the same size, 8-3/4" x 12", quite a difference from the interior pages which measured 13" x 18." Fox (no relation to Gardner) turned out a profusion of covers for *Smash*, *National*, *Crack* and *Police*, drew strips like The Death Patrol and did backgrounds on The Spirit dailies. (He once wrote a 5-week Ebony sequence.)



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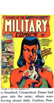
Arnold had another peculiar habit of asking the colors of just published book covers. He'd casually inquire if this month's *Hit* had a green cover. It would be blue; last month's *Police* was green. This byplay went on for months before Fox realized that comic publisher Arnold was, of all things, color blind.

Still, "Busy" was the fairest and most generous publisher in the business. Fox once heard that DC artists had their page rates raised to $35 and mentioned it to Arnold in the men's room. "Busy" matched the raise without blinking an eye.

In February 1942, Quality moved their offices to the Gurley Building in Stamford, Connecticut. Eisner had gone into the army; others were leaving almost daily. Cuidera, Powell, Guardineer, Viscardi—the bullpen had emptied out. Cole, Fox, Fine, Kotsky and a newcomer named Tony DiPreta occupied the new quarters. Gustavson, Nordling and Crandall worked at home and brought their pages in.



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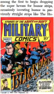
The last of the Stamford crew was Hungarian, Zoltan Szenics, staff letterer. "Zolly," as he was affectionately called, had taught his wife, Terry, to use a lettering pen and she eventually took over as his assistant without anyone being aware of the change. They found out, in due course, and added her to the staff when "Zolly" went to war. She became so proficient that when he returned, he was relegated into a position as *her* assistant.

Kotsky, Crandall and Fox soon received their draft notices and turned in their pencils for rifles. Fine and Cole remained. John Beardsley took over as editor. But changes weren't limited only to the staff; the comic market was readjusting to post-war life. The winds of change were blowing, and Quality was among the first to begin dropping the super heroes for humor strips, occasionly investing humor in previously straight strips like The Human Bomb.



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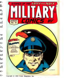
*Feature* laid the stress on humor more than any other Quality book, especially with fillers like Gill Fox's delightful POISON IVY, Al Stahl's BLIMPY-THE BUMBLING BUDDHA, and PERCY, a kid with large horn rimmed glasses who played Nemo in The Land of Dreams. ROSCOE and OFFICER SHENANIGAN also found their way into the melee.

Other titles followed suit. *Military* added features like Art Pinajian's SAILOR DANNY and Bart Tumey's PRIVATE DOGTAG. *Crack* inundated its pages with SLAP HAPPY PAPPY, FLOOGY THE FIJI, MOLLY THE MODEL, BREEZY, and Al Stahl's ribtickling INKIE. Of special interest is PEN MILLER, a comic artist who used both his pen and his fists to fight crime. The cartoonist/detective was almost a lookalike for his creator, Klaus Nordling, who wrote, drew, lettered and inked the strip which must be considered in a category all its own. Others like CHOO CHOO, EZRA and WILL BRAGG became the rule rather than the exception. With issue 44, *Military* changed its name to *Modern Comics*.



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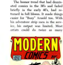
*Police* played it for laughs with Al Stahl's FLATFOOT BURNS, the "Ace Dick," and CANDY, a female Archie Andrews. *Uncle Sam Quarterly* became *Blackhawk Comics* with issue 9 and ran a CHOP CHOP humor filler along with SALTY WATERS.

*National* made a complete change to humor when the Uncle Sam strip was neatly tucked away after issue 45. Three issues earlier, Jack Cole previewed a carnival of laughs with a new strip that flew the banner of THE BARKER. The title referred to the big top spieler, Carnie Calahan, who shared billing with a curious coterie of circus characters like Lena, the fat lady; Major, the cigar-puffing midget; Tiny, the giant strongman; Spado, the four-armed spider boy; Shali, the blonde concessioner; and Colonel Lane who owned the big show.

Klaus Nordling soon took over and put the carnival on a paying basis until the show (and the book) folded its tent for the last time with issue 67, August 1948. The old strips, except Quicksilver and Sally O'Neil, were replaced by STEVE WOOD—Waterfront Detective, GRANNY GUMSHOE, LASSIE, and INTELLECTUAL AMOS. *Smash* became *Lady Luck* with issue 86.

The humor trend that had dominated comics in the 30's and faded briefly in the early 40's, had returned in full bloom. It made things easier for "Busy" Arnold too. With his adventure strip men in the service, his output was limited. Most artists could do twice as many


MODERN COMICS
JULY
10¢
Blackhawk battles The BLAST BANDITS!

humor pages in a day as straight action stuff, and through the war they did just that.

During the war years, comics were selling their entire print runs. They were shipped to servicemen overseas by the millions and profits mounted into fortunes. Besides the Quality line and The Spirit newspaper section, Arnold also sold the rights to his comics to The Editors Press Service, for use in other countries. He threw big parties for his staff and issued bonus checks regularly.

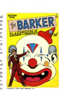
At the close of the war, Gill Fox found himself in a huge, deserted German chemical factory—wandering down long corridors, past racks of test tubes and flasks, through rooms filled with glass beakers and scientific paraphernalia. Suddenly, he spotted something at the end of a lengthy hallway—a figure, back turned, hunched over, framed in light.

He approached cautiously. The man was a soldier, a G. I. He was drawing. Drawing??

"I can smell a drawing board anywhere," Fox admitted, "and I could tell by the size and shape of the drawing what he was doing!"

"What the hell are you doing?" Fox asked the soldier.

"Comics!" the soldier answered


THE BARKER
IN A CARNIVAL OF LAUGHS & THRILLS

without even bothering to look up or turn around.

"Comics?"

"Comics!!" The reply came again. The soldier was working rapidly as if trying to meet a deadline later that night.

"For where?"

"For the States!"

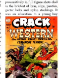
"The States??"

"Yeah! They're payin' like crazy—$40, $50 a page!" said the soldier.

"My God! I gotta get home—quick!!"

Fox left without even finding out who the soldier was. On his way stateside, he stopped for a few sessions of life drawing classes at The Grande Shamier in France. He needed it—upon his arrival home he returned to Quality to work on the sexiest comic strip (forgive us Dr. Wertham) this side of Lady Godiva—TORCHY!

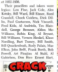
Originally done by Bill Ward in *Modern Comics*, Fox now groomed the blonde bombshell for her own book. The series was scripted by Gwen Hansen, who found more ways to get Torchy in and out of clothes than Gypsy Rose Lee. She lounged provocatively in full figure shots clad in the briefest of bras, slips, panties, garter belts and nylon stockings. It was an education to a young boy



uninitiated in the mysteries of sex appeal. It was better than a Sears-Roebuck catalog! Boston victorians were outraged; they banned it. The book folded. We, in turn, had to explain Torchy to our mothers. No one was ever maimed, tortured or killed in the strip. It was kind of a change of pace. You see it all depended on your point of view. Nevertheless, it paid to hide Torchy under a pile of Plastic Man.

Over the years, Quality's staff included most of the finest comic artists and writers in the business. Their editors included: Johnny Devlin 1937, Ed Cronin 1937-1940, Gill Fox 1940-1942, John Beardsley 1942-1943, George Brenner 1943-1951, Harry Stein 1951-1952, and Al Grenet 1952-1956.

Their pencillers and inkers were legion: Lou Fine, Jack Cole, Alex Kotsky, Bill Ward, Bill Eisner, Reed Crandall, Chuck Cuidera, Dick Dillin, Paul Gustavson, Nick Viscardi, Fred Kida, Al Andriola, Tex Blaisdell, George Brenner, Alden McWilliams, Robin King, Al Bryant, Bill Williams, Vernon Henkel, Klaus Nordling, Bart Tumey, Bill Smith, Bill Quackenbush, Rody Palais, Mac Elkan, John Belfi, Frank Borth, Bob Powell, Art Pinajian Al Stahl, Al Gabielson, Don Rico Ernest Hart,

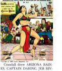


Harry Sahle, Bernard Dibble, Johnny Devlin, Dan Zolnerowich, John Cassone, Ruben Moreira, Ruth Harris, Janice Valleau, Josephine Elgin, Frank Lanning, Gill Fox, and Andre LeBlanc.

Among their writers were: Bill Woolfolk, Joe Millard, Manly Wade Wellman, Dick Wood, Dave Wood, Harry Stein, Ed Goggin, Bill Finger, Gwen Hansen, Helen Schmidt, and Bob Hyatt on text fillers.

Martin DeMuth and Pat Sprang lettered; Virginia Drury colored the books.

The dawning 50's signaled more changes for Quality publications. In 1950, Arnold bought out the Cowles' interest for $140,000. During their thirteen year partnership with Arnold they had earned almost $1,800,000 from their original $1,000 investment. As the super-hero and humor strip bowed out, new concepts took their place. *Crack* became *Crack Western*, *Kid Eternity* became *Buccaneers* and other titles turned into funny animal, war, and crime books like *Ken Shannon*, *T-Man*, *G. I. Combat* and *Marmaduke Mouse*. They initiated the largest and best selling romance magazines—a total of 20 titles which included *Heart Throbs*, *Wedding Bells*, and *Girls In Love*.

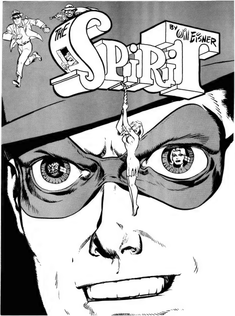


Crandall drew ARIZONA RAINES, CAPTAIN DARING, JEB RIVERS, KEN SHANNON and others including a stack of love tales. As Quality began its decline, Crandall moonlighted at EC, doing work for a number of their titles. With George Evans he produced Classic Comics like *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. He teamed with Biro on the ill-fated *Tops Magazine* and challenged the gods in *Hercules Unchained* for Dell.

Kotsky had left to do his own syndicated strip, APARTMENT 3-G. Gill Fox took over the SIDE GLANCES newspaper panel. Cole went with *Playboy*. Fine had long since moved into the field of advertising illustration and syndicated newspaper strips. Gustavson became a civil engineer. Woolfolk started his own publishing company. Eisner went into visual aid education. Millard continued his writing career outside comics. Spranger did The Saint. Moreira turned out Tarzan. McWilliams handled Twin Earths. Peddy, Viscardy, Powell, Henkel and others took their talents elsewhere.

The last to go was "Busy" Arnold himself. He had been in the comic business 20 years, amassed a comfortable bank account (and probably a few ulcers) and decided to take a long vacation in Florida. He sold what was left to DC in 1956 and closed the book forever on the Quality line.

The parade was over.


THE SPIRIT
BY Will Eisner

# SUNDAY MATINEE IDOL

THE SPIRIT was born and died on June 2, 1940.

It began quite simply. A young man wearing a blue suit and hat, red tie and matching socks had poked his head into police headquarters. "Good evening Commissioner Dolan! May I come in?" The man behind the desk acknowledged his presence with a look of annoyance. He had no time for small talk, not now. The infamous Dr. Cobra had escaped from jail again.

Sitting on the chief's desk, the visitor casually remarked, "Oh, well, suppose I, Denny Colt, criminologist and private detective, will have to aid you again! I know where Dr. Cobra is!!" Colt asked for an hour head start so he could claim the reward. What else could Dolan do? He agreed.

"Somewhere in the crooked narrow alleys that thread like grey veins through the dark heart of Chinatown, a figure darts from shadow to shadow and down through a manhole in the gutter. . ."

Before long, Denny Colt stood with pistol drawn, confronting his quarry. "The game's up, Dr. Cobra! I'm taking you in!" Not likely. Suddenly the men were locked in a violent life or death struggle, and the detective was caught in the flood of a smashed vat of experimental chemicals. He sank to the floor, rigid, unmoving in a pool of eerie liquid.

Minutes too late, Dolan and the police appeared. They found Colt and called the coroner. "This man's dead all right! Rigor mortis has already set in!" The next day his obituary ran in the newspaper, and Colt was buried in Wildwood Cemetery.

The life of The Spirit was about to begin.

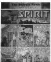
The following sequence opens as a silent, shadowy figure climbs from a grave and shortly afterward, makes his way through a window to Dolan's office. Keeping out of the light, he demands the reward money be ready upon his delivery of Dr. Cobra later that night. Dolan insists he step out of the shadows. "And let you see my face? Hardly! But for identification, you might call me . . . The Spirit!"

Later that night at the cemetery, The Spirit forces a pair of thugs to reveal the location of Dr. Cobra's hideout. At the same time, Dolan discovers The Spirit's identity. "I thought I recognized your voice back in my office! Came down here on a hunch to make sure you were dead!"

Colt explained how the chemicals had induced a state of suspended animation resembling death, and how, after he came to, he broke out of his grave. Before Dolan could ask more questions, The Spirit took off after Dr. Cobra's torpedos. He pursued the madman scientist to the waterfront, where Dolan saved his life by shooting the knife-weilding Cobra.

The danger over, Colt revealed his plans. "I'll remain dead and take up the job of being The Spirit! You know Dolan, there are criminals and crimes beyond the reach of the police, but The Spirit can reach them!"

"But how about food, money? Where'll you live?"



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"In the cemetery! As for money, I'll collect the rewards! By the way, here's my card!" Colt handed Dolan a miniature tombstone with the address . . . Wildwood Cemetery.

"But remember," Dolan warned, "if you step outside the law, I'll arrest you!"

"If you catch me!"

The Spirit returned the following week in an adventure that introduced three important new elements: a black domino mask; the police commissioner's blonde daughter, Ellen; and a small Negro taxi driver. It wasn't until the next week's story that the driver was officially part of the strip. It happened this way, as The Spirit hailed a cab:

"Say, every time I call a cab, you turn up! Are you the only cabby in town?"

"No suh, boss, but ah sho' is de fastest! Mah name is Ebony White!"

"Swell, Ebony! From now on, you'll be my exclusive cabby! Now,

◁An unpublished drawing of Will Eisner's SPIRIT step on it! We've a few stops to make!"

"Yaaah, Mr. Spirit, boss!" Ebony answered in a manner reminiscent of Jack Benny's Rochester.

A pair of yellow gloves were added, too. They would be replaced with the famous blue gloves, six weeks later. The fourth installment revealed The Spirit's underground hideout and laboratory. Subsequent adventures disclosed The Spirit as a James Bond gadget-and-gimmick man, with props like smoke pellets and such. He often piloted a kind of flying convertible with wings, called an Autoplane. At best, it was a silly idea, completely out of context with The Spirit *mis-en-scene*. In those fledgling adventures, the strip took on a rather grave and solemn attitude. The Spirit took his crime fighting seriously, facing adversaries like Dr. Cobra, Palyachi the Killer Clown, Mr. Midnight, Orang the Human Ape, The Mastermind and The Black Bow. He frequently carried a pistol, shot to kill, and once cleaned up a rat's nest with a submachine gun. Very serious stuff indeed.

Besides battling a battery of brigands, The Spirit faced an equally tough line-up of competition in the newspapers where he appeared. First and foremost came Chester Gould's razor-nosed sleuth, *Dick Tracy*. Other funnies crime-fighters included Lyman Anderson's *Inspector Wade*; Ed Sullivan's and Charles Schmidt's *Pinkerton, Jr. (Radio Patrol)*; Alexander Gillespie Raymond's and Dashiell Hammett's *Secret Agent X-9*; Alfred Andriola's *Charlie Chan* and *Kerry Drake*; Ray Bailey's, *Bruce Gentry*; and, of course, Al Capp's *Fearless Fosdick*.

For the next twelve years, The Spirit put in an appearance every week in a full color, comic-book size, Sunday newspaper supplement that was included with about 20 major metropolitan newspapers. The 16-page insert also featured, LADY LUCK and MR. MYSTIC. The former, signed with the house name "Ford Davis", was originally drawn by Chuck Mazoujian, then Nick Viscardi, and finally Klaus Nordling. Mr. Mystic, credited to "W. Morgan Thomas", was created by Bob Powell and was one of the few magician strips not imitative of Mandrake. On the contrary, it was not only different in concept, but often succeeded in topping the Mandrake stories for pure magical atmosphere.

Mr. Mystic was a turbaned, cloaked sorcerer who received his powers in Tibet (in the first supplement), and was branded on the forehead with a mystic symbol which would let "the mysteries of life be known to him." His magical powers were almost without limit; he had only to will a change or an action for it to actually happen. His 5-page tales were high in supernatural content, and read like compressed pulp thrillers. Initially, both back-up strips were better drawn than The Spirit.

Though all the elements had finally been formulated in his series, The Spirit would not find his "groove" until much later. This was the foundation period for what was to become one of the few really "adult" strips in the history of comics.

At one point, The Spirit became so popular, a radio show recounting his adventures played in cities like Washington, Philadelphia and Baltimore. Enid Hager wrote the scripts for the short-lived series. Spirit masks and pistols eventually showed up on the merchandise market, too.

The Spirit (and a host of other comic classics) were the innovations of William E. Eisner. Born in Manhattan in March 1917, he was the son of a Seventh Avenue furrier. By the age of seven, Eisner had discovered his natural talent for drawing and could frequently be found huddled over a pencil and paper. He attended De Witt Clinton High School and entertained the idea of becoming a stage designer. Architecture and perspective had always fascinated him and would serve well in constructing the unusual angle shots which he used prolifically in his strips years later.

After graduation, Eisner studied under George Bridgeman for a year at the New York Art Student's League and gained a solid foundation of anatomical knowledge and drawing techniques. This led to a staff job in the advertising department of the *New York American*. Eisner began earning his living at the drawing board.

Herriman's *Krazy Kat* and Segar's *Popeye* were particularly influential on Eisner's style, with their lightning pace and background material. He admired Caniff, considered Raymond a craftsman and was inspired by other non-comic artists like Lynd Ward, whose wood cuts and engravings Eisner considered the "pure ultimate" in visuals. Not inclined to take the easy way, he struck out in his own direction, producing work that was neither Caniff, Foster or Raymond. By combining just the right measure of "big foot" cartoons with realistic drawing, he conceived what might be called the Eisner approach.

He even worked for the pulps, producing illustrations for $10 a page in books like *Western Sheriffs and Outlaws*. "But the pulp publishers were going broke. They wanted to break into the comic market." So did Eisner!

In July, 1936, his first comic strip appeared in *Wow, What A Magazine*. CAPTAIN SCOTT DALTON, scientist-explorer, began his expedition in the Gobi Desert on the inside cover of the opening issue. Eisner also wrote, lettered and drew a pirate strip called THE FLAME, (signed Erwin, his middle name) and illustrated text story headings. The second issue featured a full-color Eisner cover painting of Dalton posing on a parapet with pistol drawn for action. Under the pseudonym Bill Rensie (Eisner backwards), he drew a secret agent strip titled HARRY KARRY.

Among his co-workers were Dick Briefer, Bob Kane, Vernon Henkel, Bernard Baily, George Brenner, Chuck Thorndyke and Lou Ferstadt. Though Eisner's strips were not particularly notable, his appearance in the magazine was. It marked the initial team-up between him and S. M. "Jerry" Iger (the book's editor) who had also worked on the *New York American* staff. Eisner continued freelancing art work to whoever was willing to give him an assignment.

Worth a small mention is his MUSS 'EM UP DONOVAN, a crime strip he drew for Centaur's *Funny Pages*. Trench-coated and pistol ready, he came on like early *Maltese Falcon*, obviously inspired by the black detective pulps of the day.

When *Wow* folded in 1937, Eisner put up his talent and $35 to form a partnership with Jerry Iger. They opened an office on Madison Avenue and 53rd Street and became one of the earliest production studios in comics. Their main account was the Editors Press Service, for which they supplied comic strips, puzzles, cartoons and other graphic diversions for publication in foreign countries.

Mort Meskin's SHEENA and Eisner's HAWKS OF THE SEAS (it was signed Willis Rensie) were two of the series produced for EPS. When Iger finally sold the material for publication in the United States to Fiction House, Hawks was one of the leading features. Created in the image of Raphael Sabatini's *The Sea Hawk*, The Hawk carved his name in the sands of the Carribean, where pirate treasure was buried with the bodies of men foolish enough to turn their backs on friends. He appeared in *Jumbo Comics* which began in September 1938.

The same book reprinted one of the first "educational" type comic strips, a graphic adaptation of the *Count of Monte Cristo*, drawn by Dick Briefer. The idea would later become the format of the *Classics Illustrated* series which featured comic versions of the classics.

Another Rensie signed strip appeared in *Rex Dexter* under the title K-51, one more Eisner secret agent character. One of his best early strips was featured in *Amazing Mystery Funnies* in 1938. Eisner signed his own name to THE 3 BROTHERS, a beautifully stylized foreign legionaire tale in the tradition of *Gunga Din*. The fact that The 3 Brothers weren't brothers at all didn't detract from Eisner's skillful handling of this minor adventure filler.

"I was running a shop in which we made comic book features pretty much the way Ford made cars. I would write and design the characters, somebody else would pencil them in, somebody else would ink, somebody else would letter. We made $1.50 a page net profit. I got very rich before I was 22." Eisner was allegedly worth $75,000 at age 25.

The Eisner-Iger shop supplied a number of publishers (including Fiction House, Fox and Quality) and developed the Universal - Phoenix Syndicate, an operation that serviced small, local newspapers with cartoon and strip material. Then came "Busy" Arnold's offer to join the art studio staff for Quality Comics. The Eisner-Iger amalgam was dissolved, Iger buying out his partner's share of the organization. In the bargain, Eisner took the shop's key men with him: Viscardi, Fine, Powell, Cuidera, and others.

At the same time, Arnold had presented the idea of having the Sunday funnies carry a comic book-sized section along with their regular features. The promotion was a natural for Arnold who had the staff to produce such a package, and the contacts to make the arrangement. He assembled a presentation of strips which his men were doing for the Quality line of comics and called together some of the newspaper editors he had known from his years at Buffalo Press. They liked the idea of a special insert, but it would have to be extremely well done.

Arnold showed some of George Brenner's old work on The Clock. Neubold of the Washington Star liked the idea, but not the artist. He selected another strip, one by Lou Fine. Arnold knew Fine couldn't handle the writing end of a weekly strip and might even be too slow to meet the art deadlines. But he knew who could do both. "That's Bill Eisner's work," Arnold volunteered (to his associates, Eisner was known as Bill, not Will).

Eisner and Arnold had been discussing a new strip, which they decided to use as the lead feature in the proposed comic. The insert became known as *The Spirit Section*. (King Features did an identical insert for a few months, running Will Gould's *Red Barry* in the lead position. Victor Fox also planned to feature The Blue Beetle in the same format).

Henry Martin, manager of The Des Moines Register and Tribune Syndicate immediately signed a contract for 16 pages a week, every week. Though the Register and Tribune had a 50% interest in Quality Publications, *The Spirit Section* was copyrighted and owned by Arnold. After he had started it moving by selling it to the *Washington Star*, *Baltimore Sun*, and *Philadelphia Record*, The Register and Tribune acted as sales agents and syndicated the comic to a score of other newspapers. Martin also handled all the business between Cowles and Quality.

In addition to the Sunday supplement, The Spirit ran in a daily newspaper strip and over the years, made appearances in *Police Comics* (from issue 11 to 102), 22 issues of his own book under the Quality label, moved to Fiction House for five issues and finally a pair of Harvey books.

The early Spirit was a diamond in the rough. In his mind's eye, Eisner saw precisely what he wanted, yet he hadn't enough experience to carry it off. He sometimes forgot to draw The Spirit's mask. Backgrounds were weak. Anatomy was out of proportion. Perspectives were often awkward.

Eisner was 23. His draft notice arrived one year later.

In the Army, Eisner was stationed in Washington as a Chief Warrant Officer attached to the office of the Chief of Ordinance, where he wrote, drew, and edited for the ordinance journal *Firepower*. He also contributed to *Army Motors*, a maintenance publication for troops, written in G.I. language. In it, he drew a widely known character called Joe Dope and employed the comic strip technique to teach, a pioneering concept in those days. The Spirit, however, continued to fight crime in his absence, drawn by Lou Fine and other Quality staffers. The Spirit still had the same mask and gloves, hat, red tie, the same blue serge suit with the same sable brush wrinkles but something was missing. It was Eisner.

Eisner returned from the service bristling with ideas. The past four years had sharpened his ideas and techniques to a razor's edge. He approached his drawing board with a fresh but grim determination and a box full of newly sharpened pencils. There would be no interruption this time. Eisner worked on through the night.

It was then that he spun a new hypothesis for The Spirit. And its impact sent seismic waves shivering through Eisner the artist, the writer—and the moralist. At last, he was able to view his work from a point of view—the something that had previously been missing. He was ready; he had matured!

Now, Eisner looked deep into the nature of cruelty, the petty cruelties that humans practiced upon one another when they don't know what living is all about. He plotted his tales with taste, conviction and solid, often brilliant, craftsmanship.

No longer did The Spirit face the costumed super-criminals who engaged his efforts in the early years. No. Eisner took the opposite approach and drew The Spirit into conflict with worn-out felons, bowery pickpockets, nickel and dime shoplifters, street corner punks, city hall grafters, shabby con men, furtive sneak thieves, stripe-suited pimps, weak-willed winos, sweat-stained stoolies, baggy pants torpedos and a rogues' gallery of other three-time losers. Eisner's brand of neo-realism was based upon real-type people in real-type situations. He translated them into intricate character studies of caricature roles played by urban man. Spirit tales began to read like human interest news stories.

He began getting the maximum from his graphics. In a superb manipulation of technical tricks and time sequences, he thrust us with word and panel into a world in an advanced state of decay, tempered with the gallows spirit of black comedy. In it, the tormented and the tormentors were frozen in a macabre brush stroke of time and space, so that we could study the details. The whole affair sounds like pure Guignol; yet it was Guignol, handled with such skill and uncommon delicacy and verve, that we emerged from it stunned but exhilarated.

The Spirit had developed a personality and the strip took on a life of its own. No longer the one dimensional crook chaser he had been, The Spirit was suddenly a man of magnificent courage and low cunning, a reckless gambler, a genius of strategies, style and substance.

He became a hero worthy of Hemingway.

He was a man caught in the grip of all-too-human dilemmas with a sublime, unfathomable faith in himself and his power to cope with the maniacal challenges the gods of chance hurled before him. "I saw The Spirit as a man with something in him approaching detachment, amusement, amazement and sympathy for man," Eisner revealed.

Physically, The Spirit looked like a combination of Alan Ladd and Dennis O'Keefe. His temperament, however, ranged from the stoic ruggedness of Bogart to the boyish virility of Jimmy Stewart.

"The drawing was somewhat realistic. But I employed exaggeration where I felt I needed it, and where I felt I wanted to be serious, I didn't employ exaggeration. I played it the way you might in music. You get louder when you feel you want to emphasize something, and you get quieter when you feel you want a downbeat. Use any device the situation allows.

"One of the artists that influenced me most, I would say, was Lynn Ward, his woodcuts and wood engravings were fantastic. And I always felt he was the father of the pure ultimate visual. Ever since then, I've tried to reach that same mountaintop, and have never been able to do it.

"I thought of myself as a writer—a visual-writer—let's put it that way. I never thought of myself as an author in the traditional sense, but a combination of the two things—artist-writer. It's very pleasing, I confess, after twenty years, to have people refer to it that way, because it gives me a sense of having accomplished something.

"To achieve the name, or to be worthy of the name, of creator, a man should be both writer and artist. Now, he doesn't have to write with words. After all, Rivera and Orozco were making murals that, as far as I'm concerned, were masterpieces of writing, because the painter had an idea and he was trying to communicate with the people who would ultimately view it. He had something to say. And that's the heart of it, having something to say.

"The man who sits down and takes somebody else's script and merely renders it into pictures is doing something, and I don't withdraw from him what is his due. But I can only measure him by the contribution he's made to the script. He is going just so far, but he has a limitation. Dali is a writer-artist combination. I could name any number of 'creators' who write and draw. You don't have to use words; that's my point."

Eisner proved his point in the dramatic way he got us into the seven-page tales.

His use of The Spirit title logo was awe-inspiring. The letters were formed by the tops of buildings in a Damascus bazaar, by the spinning waters of a whirlpool, on street signs, by the columns of a crumbling house, or on billboards, in newspaper headlines, on telegrams, spelled out by a rotting fencepost, or embroidered on a rippling veil through which the domes and minarets of Turkey could be seen.

Three-dimensional objects were thrust out of a two-dimentional medium. Photographs, notes, messages were tacked and paper-clipped onto the page. The pages themselves were occasionally drawn as though ragged and torn. And the splash page sometimes became that of a book, drawn with depth and dimension, with bent corners and frayed edges.

The Spirit's odyssey was littered with characterizations. The Spirit worked outside the law, and the law, in this case, was Commissioner Dolan (who bears no small resemblance to the pipe-smoking Eisner of the 70's). Dolan was right out of central casting—harassed, lamentable, muttering through his moustache, but possessing a heart of pure Irish gold.

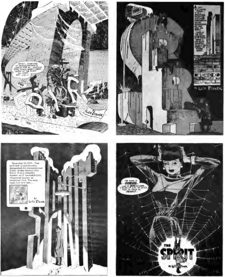
The chief's daughter, Ellen, was forever trying to ensnare The Spirit in the matrimonial trap. Her patience was extraordinary considering the harem of exotic beauties her man usually found himself entertaining. They were almost always women with jet hair piled in blue-black swirling upsweeps or long sultry page boys in perfect contrast to Ellen's coquetish, virginal blonde tresses. More than once, the masked crimefighter picked himself off the floor after getting brained by his ladylove. But then, as the saying goes, "All's fair. . .!"

Of special delight was Ebony White who played Dr. Watson to The Spirit's Sherlock Holmes. Somehow through the magic of comics, he was transformed from a youthful taxi driver to a boy of about ten or twelve. Eisner says, "Ebony was really an attempt to introduce a Negro boy in a meaningful role. He had a dignity all his own, even though he had a Southern accent."

Ebony had enough charm and Tom Sawyer cool to star in a batch of his own stories, like Young Dr. Ebony and Ebony White, Private Eye. He even wrote a song (the sheet music was actually printed), *Every Little Bug*, which was to be sung in that week's adventure by Robert Merrill. For years afterward, Spirit characters often whistled and sang the tune as the drama unfolded.

Like his mentor, Ebony never changed his clothes, it was as though he was doomed through eternity to wear the green trousers and red coat with the yellow buttons.

"Ebony was done with a great deal of love and affection. I was neither an unfrocked liberal, nor was I setting out to do any more than I thought was right. I treated Ebony in the scheme of things as it was then. There was a time when both liberal and reactionary thought *Amos and Andy* were just great. And they were being honest about it; I


SPIRIT... EVERYONE AT HEADQUARTERS IS LOOKIN' FOR YA... WATCHA DOIN' DOWN HERE? ... ALL NIGHT ... WHY?
THE SPIRIT
by Will Eisner
A CITY IS A LIVING THING...
by Will Eisner
December 25, 1949... The enclosed is specifically designated for Commissioner Dolan of the Central City Police. It is a complete dossier on E. Lonesome Cool, otherwise known as Lonesome Cool. You may read it or not...
by Will Eisner
THE NAME IS POWDER... LIKE IN GUN POWDER. I BLOW UP JUST AS QUICK, AND IS TWICE AS DEADLY...
THE SPIRIT
by Will Eisner

Typical examples of Eisner's imaginative incorporation of title design and pictorial illustration on opening pages of *The Spirit Section.*

think they thought they were being quite kind. People forget that, because we *now* discover what a terrible thing it was—patronizing Negroes. There was a time many years ago when people told Jewish jokes, and one knew they weren't being very kind. Today no one gets mad; it's part of a changing culture.

"To me, Ebony was a very human character, and he was very believable—at the time. With all the idealism I had then, I felt that he deserved to be treated as a human being, and have emotions. Remember, that was a breakaway in itself—no one ever showed Negroes in comics with any emotions other than weeping over the death of poor little Mandy, and the little white girl. Only Ham Fisher did anything like it and he stayed with the safe stereotype."

Other regulars were honest, square-jawed rookie cop, Sam Klink; bumbling, indecisive Commissioner Beagle; and Central City political boss, Ward Healy.

"I grew up in the city—I sold newspapers on the street corners as a kid. My whole background is that of a city boy. I went to high school here; all my culture is city culture. I lived in all the nooks and crannies of Manhattan and it was all part of what I had to say. Central City was New York City as far as I was concerned, and the city politics were obviously what I knew and understood. I had no other place—this is what I was drawing on, what I had to start with. I grew up in the depression, so my application of politics was in the frame of that depression."

Villains seldom appeared for return engagements—one of the few was the Octopus. He was the Ernst Stavro Blofeld of Eisner's seamy underworld, but we never saw more than his gloves, purple gloves at that. For all we knew, he could have been an octopus. And there was Mr. Carrion, sort of a John Carridine with a pet vulture, Julia. It was difficult to decide if they were amusing or revolting.

Kids always populated Eisner's strips. Besides Ebony, there was the love-sick, buck-toothed Sammy; homeless William Waif; and the football-helmeted, cigar-chewing PS who had his own abbreviated silent strip at the bottom of some of the regular pages.

One had the feeling Eisner got involved with the ultimate fate of the characters which he introduced in an endless and delightful stream. They all had names like something out of a W. C. Fields nightmare: Waxie Tallow, Mortimer J. Titmouse, Humid J. Millibar, Cracker Barl, Rocco Ayjiss, Carboy T. Gretch, Muley Trayn, Cranfranz Qwayle, Cache McStash, Nazel Twitch. The Spirit's top competitor, Dick Tracy, used names like Kiss Antel and Nilon Hose after the Eisner deluge. Eisner's favorite story is that of Gherhart Schnabble, a touching tale of a man who discovered he could fly—and no one noticed. It was almost a parody of Superman.

Then, god bless'em there were the ladies.

The sexiest females ever to slink across a comic page were Eisner's women. Other artists have drawn them more voluptuously but never with more character. They were felines with cigarette holders lounging on sensuous lips. They had exotic eyebrows and big, deep eyes you could go swimming in. They had defiant but fully feminine faces with high cheekbones and strong jaws. Their hands were always running through hair and sliding down wasp waists and voluptuous hips.

All were varied blends of Veronica Lake, Marlene Dietrich, Joan Crawford and Lauren Bacall. All had names like Thorne Strand, Wild Rice, Flaxen Weaver, Silk Satin, Autumn Mews, Wisp O'Smoke, Sparrow Fallon, and The Spirit's childhood sweetheart, Sand Saref.

They would frequently introduce themselves from full page splash panels with such Mae West repartee as . . . "The name is Powder, like in gun powder—I blow up just as quick and I'm twice as deadly!" Or, "I am Plaster, Plaster of Paris, the toast of Montmarte. I'll stick to my man until death do us part!"

Cleverest of all was P'Gell. Flirting with torture and death, she promised a taste of paradise from behind a veil of deceit. A luxurious cat of a woman, she introduced herself with, "I am P'Gell and this is not a story for little boys." The crueler the villianess, the more attractive Eisner made her. P'Gell took the cake—and anything else she could lay her hands on. Forceful, agressive, she lived by her wits and wiles in a world tangled with webs of treachery. P'Gell could handle anything. Her exotic garb revealed the form and flow of her figure. She decorated couches with suggestive poses that didn't simply hint at it. Her poses shouted it. And we all know what "it" is. She knew.

The women in The Spirit's life wouldn't be complete without mention of Hazel Macbeth, a witch who showed up every Halloween to brew up a cauldron of skeletons, spells and smiles. (Eisner's Christmas specials let another Spirit fight crime and evil—the Spirit of Christmas. Like Frank Capra films, they were touching melodramas of blind orphans, Santa Claus' and about-to-be reformed convicts.)

Eisner's characters did not so much act (in terms of plot) as react. His exceptionally complex plotting always lurked in the background, breaking through only long enough to provide the characters with an opportunity to develop or evolve. He was fascinated by how much his cast of characters could suffer before they let go of their obsessions. He invested himself in their suffering and ultimately saw them through to their freedom.

As Eisner exploited the problems of human frailty, *The Spirit* forever found himself amidst colorful and intriguing locales. He traveled to the acrid deserts of Egypt, tracked criminals for a month across the South Sea islands and even went West for a few weeks to capture an old gunfighter.

The Spirit's conspiracies were always explosive with comedy and pathos, poignancy and bathos. He parodied Spillane in private eye tales told in the first person; kidded *Lassie Come Home* in a doggy drama called Barkarole; tackled Francis, the talking mule in sagas about vocal horses, bulls and, even a cockroach ("No nuts please, ees toff to chew"). Then, there were Spirit classics like *Death and Taxes*. In each, Eisner said something about the complex nature of justice, even if the plot did strain credibility to the point of hernia.

"The Spirit gave me a chance to burlesque movies, plays and books." An inveterate parable twister, Eisner began with a premise, ranging from the ordinary to sheer fantasy and developed its implications with loving care. He was inspired by everything. He did *High Noon*-type showdowns, locked room mysteries, take-offs on radio soap operas, kidded movies like Hitchcock's *Paradine Case*, Broadway plays such as *Arsenic and Old Lace*, fairy tales like *Cinderella* and any news stories that caught his fancy. He put the "comic" back in comic strip.

Eisner never missed an opportunity to satirize commercial ventures in tales like the *Miss Rhine Maiden of 1950 Contest* or *Lurid Love Comics* complete with typical ads.

Eisner read voraciously, always replenishing the well: Somerset Maugham, Guy de Maupassant, Norman Corwin, Poe and Ben Hecht who wrote films like *Gunga Din* and *Spellbound*.

"One of my big influences in writing was the short story — the O'Henry short stories, the Ambrose Bierce short stories, and so forth. I was an avid short story reader and, as I got into the business, they became really useful. I used to seek out short stories wherever I could. I picked up once, in an old book store, a collection of short stories written in Scotland in 1830, from the newspaper called *The Border Papers*. They'd have short stories in them every week, like a weekly newspaper; very much like the short stories of the period when Charles Dickens wrote. I was a great fan of Hecht; and I was also a very great fan of O'Henry and the whole gamut which I mentioned before. These had the twist ending, the surprise ending, and so forth.

"But The Spirit, actually, as I saw it (and as I saw comic books), was nothing but a series of short stories. They were the pulps in visual form."

That collective pool of fact and fiction would be momentarily translated into Spirit adventures. Not that Eisner couldn't have started from scratch, he was just telling us how The Spirit would've handled them. The Spirit was really a device around which Eisner could tell a story. The results were a pure joy.

"When I did The Spirit, I really wrote my heart out; I was saying what I wanted to say. I couldn't have done it with more intensity and honesty, and I'm rather proud of the fact that most of the things I've done in my career were done honestly.

"I always thought of myself as a craftsman when doing The Spirit. It was really a culmination of all the talent, skill and imagination I could muster. Prior to that time I was just making a living. The Spirit was the first major effort in my life where I was able to do something I wanted to do, and was doing something I thought was meaningful, and at the same time making money on it. They were good years!

"I felt that I was at the epitome of the media, and that I was helping in the development of a media in itself. Comics before that were pretty much pictures in sequence, and I was trying to create an art form. I was conscious of that, and I used to talk about it. I remember when, especially in the days when Feiffer was working for me, we used to have long discussions about comics as an art form. 'How can we improve this?' 'How can we make this better?' 'How can we do better things?'

"It was almost a continuing laboratory, and I was very lucky, because there wasn't anybody who could stop me from doing what I wanted. I had only to stay within those bounds of propriety that would enable it to get by the editor of the newspaper."

"I am always, or I was anyway, always generating ideas, and it didn't matter to me where they went or who took them. I don't lay a claim to any of these ideas, it's just, you know, everybody gets influenced by everybody else. I was influenced by people who were doing backgrounds for me. And I'm sure they were influenced by me."

Eisner's pantomimic gifts were of a high order. The deranged wore the ultimate masks of madness. His maniacs had faces as twisted as their minds and motives. Brutes looked brainless, crooks crafty. Ebony was quizzical, Commissioner Dolan harried and indignant. And The Spirit registered everything from cute tongue-in-cheek chagrin to the fiercest of determined stares. Rarely has expression been under such complete control. Eisner was a scientist in the realm of precise comic timing, an artist who made virtually every pratfall a summary of the human condition.

But Eisner's real genius lay in the fusion of illustrations and scripts—the superb physical telling of crisp, incisive stories. His graphic virtuosity remains unchallenged, like *Citizen Kane*, Orson Welles' paramount cinematic achievement, to which Eisner's work has been frequently compared.

"I grew up on the movies, that's what I lived with. The movies always influenced me. I was seriously interested in the theatre at one time, and at one point I wanted to be a stage designer. It was really something I was terribly interested in. Then, for economic reasons, it just didn't seem like a viable thing, but I still retained an interest in the theatre.

"The early Man Ray films interested me tremendously. I used to go down to the New School and spend hours looking at these old Man Ray experimental films; and it gradually dawned on me that the films were nothing but frames on a piece of celluloid, which is really no different than frames on a piece of paper. And pretty soon, it became to me film on paper, and so, obviously, the influence was there.

"But timing within sequences—I think I was influenced by almost any film. I think if anyone asked me what films were the ones that I thought were most exciting, or most interesting, I really couldn't put my finger on it. I suppose people can later in life, point to an author that influenced them most. With me, there were many."

"Doing The Spirit strip was like making movies. It gave me a chance to be an actor, producer, author, and cameraman all at once."

The Spirit became a miracle of compression. Eisner built a mosaic of characterizations into every saga. Never has so much happened to so many in so few pages. Stories were told with words *and* pictures. Eisner's tales were so heavily atmospheric, they tended to resemble the films of the Germanic expressionists of the 20's—Fritz Lang, Paul Leni and Fredrich Murnau. Pictures like Robert Siodmak's *Spiral Staircase* and *The Killers* approximate The Spirit. Or Jules Dassin's *Brute Force* and *Night and the City*. And, of course, much of Hitchcock.

Lang, who made nightmarish films like *M* and *Ministry of Fear* has said, "I read a lot of newspapers, and I read comic strips . . . from which I learned a lot. I said to myself, if an audience year in, year out, reads so many comic strips, there must be something interesting in them. And I found them very interesting. I got (and still get, today) an insight into the American character, into American humor, and—I learned slang." The Spirit had to be his first choice as a favorite.

Eisner was the first to realize that the size of a panel equals, in filmic terms, the length of a shot in time. With this knowledge he created stories with definite pacing. "I've always felt there was a meter to a story, a timing. I would invent things to create a time frame. I'd say this is probably what I worked on the hardest."

Short, silent action shots were interjected to add power and speed. Silent sequences created a purely visual flow of action. Long shots were contrasted with close-ups. Angles were played against each other. Low angle tilt shots deified The Spirit and surrounded him with a mysterious aura no other hero ever achieved. And at the moment of the highest dramatic intensity, Eisner would cut to a high-angle shadow shot that rocked you clear out of your seat.

Eisner transformed comic pages into film storyboards.

He even added a sound track. Telephones jangled incessantly. Readers heard the *crunch crunch crunch* of feet in newly fallen snow, the *chigg chigg chigg* of a teletype machine, the bonging of a clock tower ringing in the new year, the *click clack click* of heels on wet concrete, the *ratatat* of a chopper. Once, The Spirit's own footsteps mockingly echoed the name of the man he hunted . . . *Ha-Med-Je-Bru*.

Sometimes Eisner used an empty street as part of the story. When he drew fog, the page was damp. And the rain, always the rain, dripping off everything including The Spirit logo. He lingered over environments until you could almost smell the cheap hotel rooms, taste the tension, or feel on your flesh the chilly pall of a rain-swept street.

No glossing over for Eisner. Footsteps echoed on wet sidewalks. Cracked tenements were infested with seamy torpedos in threadbare clothes. From political bosses to bums, in the struggles between the power-hungry and the powerless, Eisner had an uncanny eye for telling detail. Often he told us more than we wanted to know.

The Spirit dwelled in a dark universe of mausoleums and tombstones, of dead leaves fleeing the oncoming wind, knotted, moss-laden trees whose naked limbs reached out like bared nerve endings, old fences rolling over the tops of hills on which malific mansions perched like vultures. Instead of riding into the sunset, The Spirit vanished into the moonrise over Wildwood Cemetery.

Lighting was highly controlled. Long shadows streaked across panels. Silhouettes and dramatic spotlights appeared from nowhere simply because they looked great. While Kirby thrust you into the thick of a slug fest, Eisner viewed violence from a distance in the most common straightforward shots. The Spirit's brawls were symphonies of lyrical violence. He collided with culprits at angles that indicated, at the height of his arc, he had easily doubled the world's high jump record. He leaned into punches at 45 degree angles.

When blood flowed, it was in pools. The Spirit could be knifed, run down by a truck, brained by a brick, have pipes reshaped on his head, be broken into a heap of splintered bone by a band of brutes, or shot point-blank and recover a page later. He often nursed his wounds for weeks afterward. He endured. But it wasn't easy. He felt pain. Lots of it.

Looking around at other crime-busters of the decade, one must certainly speculate on the similarities between The Spirit and TV's *Peter Gunn*. Consider the Gunn format; a prologue teaser sequence; the introduction of supporting characters, Gunn's blonde girl friend, Police Inspector Jacoby (an absolute double for Eisner himself) and saloon owner Mother (substitute Ebony here). A crime is committed, Gunn gets involved, some by-play with an exotic female, a bizarre character whom Pete always slipped a few bucks for important information, and the final shoot-out and twist ending. Sound familiar? You better believe it!

At times, The Spirit reads like Camus' *The Stranger*. Wherever he went, no one seemed to be aware of his mask or the fact that it adhered to his face like a skin graft, pliable to every expression. Surrealistically, he lived in his own grave under Wildwood Cemetery. He gumshoed around the city in a kind of existentialist documentary, implacable in pursuit of seemingly impossible goals. He had an equanimity in the face of endless, self-inflicted chaos.

Eisner explained it his own way. "The Spirit is, you could say, a pure existentialist if I understand existentialism and I'm not sure I do. He was living in and dealing with the world as it was and solving crimes for no apparent reason. He was, always, like everybody else, a victim of circumstance. The Spirit was the only real middle-class crime fighter!

"He had all the middle-class motivations, which is that 'I've got to have something to do; this is my thing, this is my shtick,' and he went out and did it. Of course, the big problem each week was to figure out an acceptable reason why he should get involved in the first place.

"People say to me shyly, 'You really had tongue in cheek all the time, didn't you? It was all a big put on.' Well, yes, in a way, because I could never understand why any crime-fighter woud go out and fight crime. Why the hell a guy should run around with a mask and fight crime was beyond me.

"There again it was a part of my own background, this kind of mystical thinking, in which I've always felt that people do the things they have to do. So man does what he's confronted with. You put a man in front of a wall, he will climb the wall, just the way an ant does. As he builds a society, he builds a wall and then struggles to climb it."

Eisner created a fatuous universe of streets, sewers and skylines and set his cast of characters adrift, tenaciously clinging to rafts of base instincts. He painted broad metaphors, making his statements of serious comedy, the sort of thing that fell flat on its face when molded by less skillful hands. He stated over and over that existence is, in the final analysis, an irrational mystery.

The Spirit took his last curtain call on September 28, 1952. He had gradually retreated into the role of an inconspicuous master of ceremonies, emceeing tales in which he often played a decisive but unwitting part, usually a page seven walk-on.

Like The Spirit, Eisner was a dedicated man. "I gave up The Spirit because I had to make a choice. There were too many other things going on and I hated to turn it over to other people. So I dropped it. I decided I'd rather be an entrepreneur than an artist."

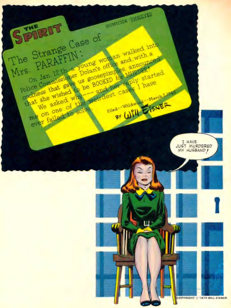
Today, Eisner owns several corporations specializing in visual educational aids, a field in which he happens to be somewhat of an authority. His masterpiece, however, will continue to inform the artistic sensibilities of generations yet to come.

For that reason, we resurrect The Spirit for the next seven pages.

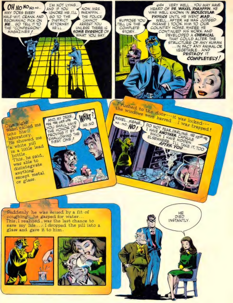
The SPIRIT SECTION

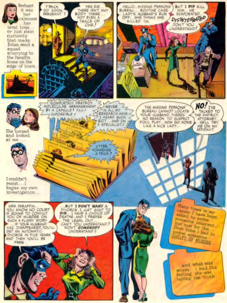
# THE SPIRIT

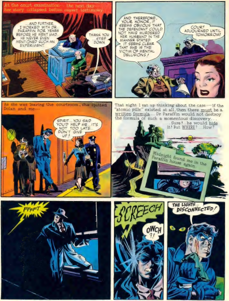
ACTION Mystery ADVENTURE

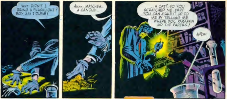

THE SPIRIT
HOMICIDE : UNSOLVED
The Strange Case of Mrs. PARAFFIN:
On Jan. 12 th a young woman walked into Police Commissioner Dolan's office and, with a coolness that gave us goosepimples, announced that she wished to be BOOKED for MURDER!
We asked why--- and her reply started me on one of the weirdest cases I have ever failed to solve.
filed--Wildwood--March 7, 1948
BY Will EISNER
I HAVE JUST MURDERED MY HUSBAND!

COPYRIGHT © 1974 WILL EISNER

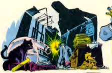

OH NO NO NO NO... WHY DOES EVERY HALF-WIT, CRANK AND EGOMANIAC PICK ON **ME**... GO TELL IT TO THE "CONFESSION" MAGAZINES!
I'M NOT LYING... AND IF YOU IGNORE ME, I'LL GO TO THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY. HE'LL...
NOW, MRS. PARAFFIN... THE POLICE CANNOT ARREST YOU UNLESS THERE IS **SOME EVIDENCE** OF WHAT YOU SAY.
SUPPOSE YOU TELL US THE COMPLETE STORY...
SIGH ...VERY WELL...YOU MAY HAVE HEARD OF **DR. WAXEL PARAFFIN**.. HE WAS WELL KNOWN IN **MOLECULAR PHYSICS** UNTIL HE WENT **MAD**... WELL...AFTER HE WAS JUDGED INSANE I TOOK HIM TO OUR COUNTRY HOME, WHERE HE CONTINUED HIS WORK AND DEVELOPED A **CHEMICAL** THAT COULD ALTER THE STRUCTURE OF ANY HUMAN ...IN FACT ANY ANIMAL OR VEGETABLE.. AND **DESTROY** IT **COMPLETELY!**
One night... Waxel called me into his laboratory. He showed me a white pill in a little lead bottle. This, he said, was able to disintegrate anything except metal or glass.
AND, MY DEAR, HEE HEE HEE HEE YOU SHALL HAVE THE HONOR OF PROVING IT BY SWALLOWING THE FIRST ONE!
WHAT? NO..NO
I rushed to the door---it was locked--- the windows were barred... I was trapped!
WAXEL... PLEASE NO.. NO.. **NO!**
DO NOT FEAR, DARLING.. HEE HEE HEE I HAVE **ANOTHER** CAPSULE WHICH I HAVE HIDDEN ELSEWHERE.. I'LL TAKE IT, TOO .... **AFTER YOU**...
Suddenly he was seized by a fit of coughing... he gasped for water... This, I realized, was the last chance to save my life... I dropped the pill into a glass and gave it to him.
HE DIED INSTANTLY.


Perhaps it was her calmness ... her level tone ... or just plain curiosity that made Dolan send a squad scurrying to the Paraffin home on the edge of town.
Y'BACK SO SOON, SERGEANT ?
YES SIR ... THERE ISN'T ANY BODY THERE ... NOT EVEN A TRACE OF ONE !
HELLO ... MISSING PERSONS BUREAU ... ROUTINE CASE ... LADY'S HUSBAND'S RUN OFF ... SHE THINKS SHE KILLED 'IM.
BUT I DID KILL HIM ... HE EVAPORATED ... DISINTEGRATED ... DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND ?
She turned and looked at me ...
I couldn't resist ... I began my own investigation ...
COMPLETELY DESTROY MOLECULAR ARRANGEMENT BY A CAPSULE ? FAH ! IMPOSSIBLE !
NEVER IN ALL MY RESEARCH HAVE I HEARD SUCH ROT ... AND I'M A SPECIALIST !
UTTER NONSENSE ... A TRICK !
THE MISSING PERSONS' BUREAU CANNOT LOCATE YOUR HUSBAND ... THERE'S NO REASON TO SUSPECT FOUL PLAY ... NOW GO HOME LIKE A NICE LADY ...
NO! I'VE TALKED TO THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY ... HE'LL TRY ME ON MY AFFIDAVIT.
MRS. PARAFFIN ... YOU KNOW NO COURT IS GOING TO CONVICT YOU OF MURDER ON SUCH A FLIMSY STORY ... IF YOUR HUSBAND HAS DISAPPEARED, YOU'LL GET AN AUTOMATIC DIVORCE IN FIVE YEARS AND THEN YOU'LL BE FREE.
... BUT I DON'T WANT A DIVORCE ... I JUST WANT TO DIE ... I HAVE A CHOICE OF DEATHS, AND I PREFER THE LEGAL OUT ... CAN'T YOU UNDERSTAND ? WON'T SOMEBODY UNDERSTAND ?
Many times in my career I have been asked to prove someone innocent ... but now for the first time I had to prove someone GUILTY OF MURDER ...
... and what was worse ... I had the feeling she was telling the truth.

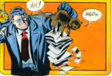

At the court examination -- the next day -- her story collapsed before expert testimony.
...AND FURTHER, I WORKED WITH DR. PARAFFIN FOR YEARS BEFORE HE WENT MAD. HE NEVER EVEN MENTIONED SUCH AN EXPERIMENT.
THANK YOU ...STEP DOWN
AND THEREFORE, YOUR HONOR, IT SEEMS OBVIOUS THAT THE DEFENDANT COULD NOT HAVE MURDERED HER HUSBAND IN THE MANNER STATED. IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT SHE IS THE VICTIM OF MENTAL DELUSIONS!
COURT ADJOURNED UNTIL TOMORROW!
As she was leaving the courtroom, she spotted Dolan and me---
SPIRIT... YOU SAID YOU'D HELP ME... IT'S NOT TOO LATE... DON'T GIVE UP!
That night I sat up thinking about the case---If the "atomic pills" existed at all, then there must be a written formula... Dr Paraffin would not destroy the formula of such a momentous discovery... ...Sure!..he would hide it! But WHERE? ...How?
Midnight found me in the Paraffin house again.
FFFFT
SCREECH
OWCH ?!
THE LIGHTS... DISCONNECTED!

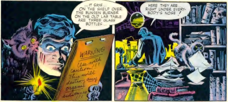

WHY DIDN'T I BRING A FLASHLIGHT? BOY, AM I DUMB!
AHH... MATCHES... A CANDLE...
... A CAT!..SO YOU SCRATCHED ME, EH?? YOU CAN MAKE IT UP TO ME BY TELLING ME WHERE DOC PARAFFIN HID THE PAPERS!
MEOW

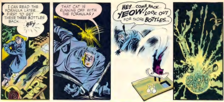
The laboratory had been searched thoroughly --therefore the formula must have been hidden in a place so obvious that the police would overlook it--- I saw a pile of old scientific journals lying on top of Paraffin's desk...



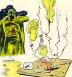
I began leafing through them, and sure enough, halfway through the pile---stuck between the pages of a tattered old magazine---I found The FORMULA!

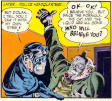


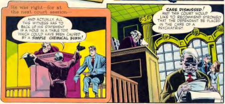

...IT SAYS... ON THE SHELF OVER THE BUNSEN BURNER ON THE OLD LAB TABLE ARE THREE GLASS BOTTLES...
WARNING
Use with caution!!! This will destroy any organic substance!!!
HERE THEY ARE.. RIGHT UNDER EVERY-BODY'S NOSE!

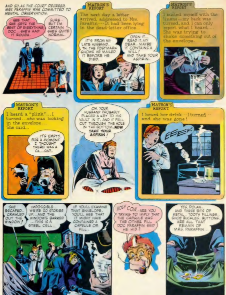

I CAN READ THE FORMULA LATER... FIRST TO GET THESE THREE BOTTLES BACK.... HEY
THAT CAT IS RUNNING OFF WITH THE FORMULAS!
HEY... COME BACK... YEOW! LOOK OUT FOR THOSE BOTTLES...

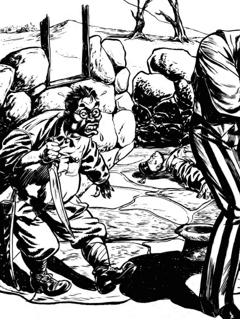
When the smoke cleared away, the lead bottles were empty -- there was no cat --- no paper --- nothing but a hole in the wooden top of the laboratory table.




LATER... POLICE HEADQUARTERS...
BUT DOLAN.. I TELL YOU I SAW IT WITH MY OWN EYES!
O.K... O.K! I BELIEVE YOU... BUT SINCE THE FORMULA, THE CAT, AND THE LIQUID ARE ALL GONE... WHO WILL BELIEVE YOU?

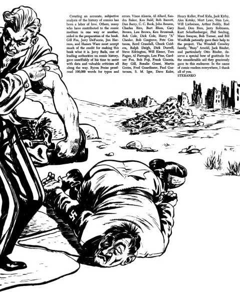

He was right--for at the next court session---
...AND ACTUALLY, ALL THIS WITNESS HAS TO BACK UP HIS STATEMENT IS A HOLE IN A TABLE TOP, WHICH COULD HAVE BEEN CAUSED BY A SIMPLE CHEMICAL BURN!
CASE DISMISSED! AND THIS COURT WOULD LIKE TO RECOMMEND STRONGLY THAT THE DEFENDANT BE PLACED IN THE CARE OF A PSYCHIATRIST.


AND SO, AS THE COURT DECREED, MRS PARAFFIN WAS COMMITTED TO MENTAL OBSERVATION.
SEE THAT SHE GETS THE BEST OF EVERYTHING, DOC... SHE'S HAD IT ROUGH.
SURE.. BUT I'M CERTAIN SHE'S QUITE NORMAL.
MATRON'S REPORT
The next day a letter arrived, addressed to Mrs. Paraffin---It had been lying in the dead-letter office...
IT'S FROM MY LATE HUSBAND.. TH..THE POSTMARK SHOWS HE MAILED IT BEFORE HE DIED...
OPEN IT... READ IT, MY DEAR.. MAYBE IT CONTAINS A WILL! AND TAKE YOUR ASPIRIN.
MATRON'S REPORT
I busied myself with the linens--my back was turned, and I can only report what I heard.... She was trying to shake something out of the envelope.
MATRON'S REPORT
I heard a "plink"... I turned... she was looking in the envelope... She said..
...IT'S EMPTY.. FOR A MOMENT I THOUGHT THERE WAS A CA... CAP...
OH, YOUR HUSBAND PROBABLY PLACED A KEY TO HIS VAULT IN IT, AND IT FELL OUT THROUGH THE HOLE IN THE BOTTOM. NOW TAKE YOUR ASPIRIN!
MATRON'S REPORT
I heard her drink---I turned--- and she was gone!
EEEK
SHE ESCAPED.. CRAWLED OUT THE WINDOW!
IMPOSSIBLE... WE'RE 20 STORIES UP... AND THE WINDOW'S BARRED ...THIS IS A STEEL CELL.
IF YOU'LL EXAMINE THAT ENVELOPE, YOU'LL SEE THAT IT MIGHT HAVE CONTAINED A CAPSULE OR PILL..
HOLY COW...ARE YOU TRYING TO IMPLY THAT THE CAPSULE WAS THE OTHER PILL DOC PARAFFIN SAID HE HID?
YES, DOLAN.. AND THESE BITS OF METAL.. TOOTH FILLINGS.. SHOE BUCKLES.. BUTTONS.. ARE ALL THAT REMAIN OF MRS. PARAFFIN...

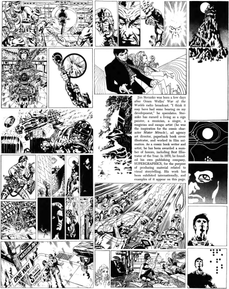


Creating an accurate, subjective analysis of the history of comics has been a labor of love. Others, many who have contributed to the comic medium in one way or another, aided in the preparation of the book. Gill Fox, Jerry DeFuccio, Jim Harmon, and Hames Ware must accept much of the credit for making this book what it is. Jerry Bails, one of leading authorities on comic history, gave unselfishly of his time to assist with data and valuable criticism all along the way. Byron Preiss proofread 100,000 words for typos and errors. Vince Alascia, Al Allard, Sandra Baker, Ken Bald, Bob Barrett, Dan Barry, C. C. Beck, John Benson, Charles Biro, Burt Blum, Gary Brown, Len Brown, Ken Bruzenak, Bob Cole, Dick Cole, Harry "A" Chesler, Bob Cosgrove, Pete Costanza, Reed Crandall, Chuck Cuidera, Ralph Daigh, Dick Durrell, Steve Edrington, Will Eisner, Tom Fagan, Al Farrugio, Lou Fine, Gardner Fox, Bob Fuji, Frank Giacoia, Ray Gill, Rosalie Grassi, Martin Greim, Fred Guardineer, Paul Gustavson, S. M. Iger, Dave Kaler, Henry Keller, Fred Kida, Jack Kirby, Alex Kotsky, Mort Leav, Stan Lee, Will Lieberson, Arthur Peddy, Rod Reed, Don Rico, Jerry Robinson, Kurt Schaffenberger, Phil Seuling, Marc Swayze, Bob Turner, and Bill Woolfolk patiently gave their help to the project. The Wendell Crowley family, "Busy" Arnold, Jack Binder, and particularly Otto Binder, deserve a special bow of gratitude for the considerable aid they graciously gave to this endeavor. In the name of comic readers everywhere, I thank all of you.

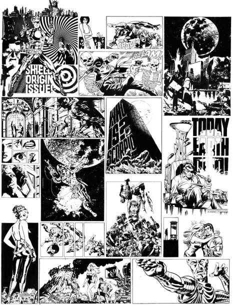
STERANKO

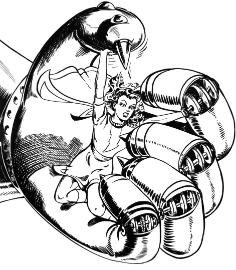


"AND NOW..." Mort Leav's famous victory cartoon which ran in military periodicals all over the world just after the close of the war in Europe.



Jim Steranko was born a few days after Orson Welles' *War of the Worlds* radio broadcast. "I think it may have had some bearing on my development," he speculates. Steranko has earned a living as a sign painter, a musician, a singer, a magician and escape artist (he was the inspiration for the comic character *Mister Miracle*), ad agency art director, paperback book cover illustrator, and worked in film animation. As a comic book writer and artist, he has been awarded a number of honors, including Best Illustrator of the Year. In 1970, he founded his own publishing company, SUPERGRAPHICS, for the purpose of producing material related to visual storytelling. His work has been exhibited internationally, and examples of it appear on this page.


SHIELD ORIGIN ISSUE!
CRUNCH
BA-LAM!
WHO IS SCORPIO
TODAY EARTH DIED!



HOLY MOLEY!! Unpublished version of Mary Marvel cover by Jack Binder.